Anastasia Seregina

Performing Fantasy and Reality

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Performing Fantasy and Reality

Anastasia Seregina

Aalto University
School of Business
Department of Marketing

Main dissertation advisor
John W. Schouten, Aalto University School of Business, Finland

Opponent
Matthias Bode, University of Southern Denmark, Denmark

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Abstract

Fantasy is a phenomenon that has a strong presence in both everyday life and in research. Fantasy is a central part of contemporary, consumption-oriented culture through its strong ties to the development of identity, the construction of communities, the attainment of desires, and the creation of meanings. Nevertheless, fantasy in itself is rarely the focus of research and thus remains undefined and under-explained. Moreover, research that does note fantasy tends to accentuate only its entertaining and leisurely aspects, presenting it as something unserious, irrational, and escapist. Studies further tend to present fantasy as something purely cognitive and imagery-based. However, fantasy is also a bodily and shared experience that is tied to materiality, space, and culture. It therefore becomes important to explore fantasy as a phenomenon in its own right from a bodily and negotiated point of view.

In this research, I explored how individuals engage in the performance of fantasy in order to gain a better understanding of the phenomenon as a subjective experience that is a part of contemporary Western culture. Talking on a performance methodology that focuses on experience, participation, and interaction, I collected data ethnographically in the context of live action role-playing games. I supported the ethnography with art-based research that took form in visual art addressing the theory and data analysis of this study.

I propose that fantasy can be described as the conscious engagement in two parallel performances, the performance of reality and its transformation that is outside of our symbolic order. Fantasy is therefore a different approach to and interpretation of normalised performance and reality. I further show that fantasy is intrinsically tied into the performance of reality. Fantasy allows investment into reality through its explicitly reflexive nature that pushes individuals to become aware of and thus also critical of the structures of their everyday performances. Lastly, I map out two different types of fantasy performance, entertainment-driven fantasy and exploration-driven fantasy. These differ in the ways individuals negotiate roles, interaction, space, time, and materiality as part of the performance. Entertainment-driven fantasy allows momentary attainment of personal desires, while exploration-driven fantasy leads to more long-term agency through reflexive learning.

All in all, this research brings new insight into the understanding of fantasy as part of contemporary consumer culture, tying it into experiences of space, materiality, agency, desire, Utopia, nostalgia, mass media, and entertainment. Through shedding light on fantasy's intrinsic connection to reality, this study examines not only the human experience of the non-real, but also our current subjective experience of reality, society, and shared meaning.

Keywords Fantasy, imagination, performance, theatre, LARP, live action role-playing game, consumer culture, art-based research

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The best aspect of any explorative and artistic work is its process. That part is, sadly, over for this endeavour. New quests await!

In Helsinki, August 2016
Anastasia Seregina

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1 INTRODUCTION

It would be impossible to imagine a person that never imagines (Bammer 1991; Hinerman 1992). Imagination, that is, the ability to conceive and to perceive something not directly experienced, is a natural, essential, and defining part of human beings (Tolkien 1964; Levy 1998). It supports our intelligence and cognition, as well as supports meaning and social interaction, the foundational marls of human existence (Sartre 1940; Schechner 1988; Scott 1994). Imaginary elements are thus a significant part of human life, which hold within themselves ideals and possibilities of humanity (Schechner 1993). What is probably unique to human beings is the fact that we not only engage in dreaming and imagining, but we also reflect and elaborate on these processes, resulting in our ability to create and improve by placing our wants, goals, and desires into the realm of the imaginary (Schechner 1993). The imaginary is thus also a central part of consumption, and its understanding becomes of great importance to consumer research (Peñaloza 2001; Kozinets et al. 2004; Martin 2004).

Imagination, however, is elusive because it is too perfect in its unreal essence (Campbell 1987). To become understood, shared, and discussed among people, imagination needs to be extended by concepts and experiences from within what we perceive as reality (Fine 1983). Tolkien (1964) suggested that fantasy works as this operative link to imagination. Simply put, fantasy can be defined as experiencing something that is consciously perceived as not real. I will elaborate on the definition in the following chapters.

Fantasy is something people devote a considerable amount of time to (Tolkien 1964; Cohen and Taylor 1976; Walton 1990, 1997), and something they spend a great deal of time in (Goffman 1974). Individuals devote a lot of energy and attention to fantasy, and it has become an important tangible, communally shared presence in contemporary life that now resides within acknowledged imaginary spaces (Saler 2012). Fantasy is a part of our culture (McConachie 2008), our world (Appadurai 1998), our everyday lives (Armitt 1996). Nevertheless, fantasy is a concept that is poorly defined and is rarely the focus of research.

In this research, I explore how individuals experience fantasy in order to gain a better understanding of the phenomenon and its place in contemporary Western culture. In contrast to the typical perspective on fantasy as something entertaining, visual, individual, and cognitive, I approach fantasy as bodily and negotiated experience in order to gain understanding of it as multisensory and changing. In my work, I take on a performance approach, which is a methodology that focuses on experience, participation, and interaction. Through an ethnographic study of

live action role-playing games, I propose that fantasy involves a different approach to and interpretation of normalised performance and reality. I show that individuals are able to invest in reality and gain a feeling of agency through engaging in fantasy. Moreover, I map out two different types of fantasy performances, one of which focuses on momentary realisation of desires and the other on a more long-term agency through reflexive understanding of performance structures. Overall, fantasy transpires to be a complex performance that is intrinsically tied into our everyday lives.

1.1 Fantasy in Consumer Research

Within the field of consumer research, the concept of fantasy has received some attention in recent years, with studies noting the importance of fantasy as part of contemporary consumption (e.g. Peñaloza 2001; Kozinets et al. 2004; Martin 2004; Illouz 2007; St. James, Handelman, and Taylor 2011; Chronis, Arnould, and Hampton 2013). Research has linked fantasy to the creation and attainment of desires (Campbell 1987; McCracken 1988; Zizek 1997), the creation of communities (Kozinets 2002a; Goulding, Shankar, and Canniford 2011), the evoking of meaning (Peñaloza 2001; Martin 2004; Goulding, Shankar, and Canniford 2011), and the development of individuals' identities (Schouten 1991; Belk and Costa 1998). Fantasy has become domesticated in consumption (Zukin 1991), especially through its traditional association with leisure, entertainment, and lack of productivity (Goffman 1967; Campbell 1987). This link to consumption, in turn, connects fantasy to structures of economic power and cultural value (Goffman 1967; Zukin 1991; Zizek 1997). Fantasy contributes "to human cognition and everyday life in a capitalist market economy" (p. 30) in that it helps produce communities, structures, and futures (Saler 2012). Moreover, Firat and Ulusoy (2007) as well as Borghini et al. (2009) note that companies increasingly drive thematisation and the use of fantasy. Fantasy thus becomes an important and a fruitful issue to investigate within consumer research.

Fantasy has become an especially important element in the organisation of space, which has also become increasingly dependent on consumption (Agnew 1986; Zukin 1991). In her study of landscapes, Zukin (1991) proposed that a central form of organising space and creating place in contemporary western culture is fantasy landscapes. Such places are most noticeable in large, public places, such as shopping centres or theme parks, but can also be a part of urban housing or city centre public architecture. She further points out that "building theme parks, theme towns, and other artificial complexes is now a favoured strategy of economic renewal" (p. 266). Consumer research has explored various consumption contexts that incorporate fantasy (e.g., Belk and Costa 1998; Sherry et al. 2001; Kozinets et al. 2004), such as serviscapes, theme parks, and heritage sites, but has not given direct attention to their fantasy-related aspects. Research has noted an increasing move within marketing and retail toward themed environments and experiences (Sherry et al. 2001; Kozinets et al. 2004), and it thus becomes important to better understand fantasy as a part of these entities. Anoth-

er important context for the concept of fantasy has been gaming, both digital and brick-and-mortar (Martin 2004; Molesworth 2006). Nevertheless, studies have rarely taken fantasy as their focus when exploring these contexts.

Material elements are also an important part of fantasy settings (Rook and Levy 1983; Belk and Costa 1998; Martin 2004; Fernandez and Lastovicka 2011; St. James, Handelman and Taylor 2011). However, while the way in which meaning is incorporated into objects has been thoroughly studied (Belk 1988; Ahuvia 2005; Fernandez and Lastovicka 2011), the incorporation of the material world into fantasy experience is still largely unexplored (Fernandez and Lastovicka 2011; Jenkins, Nixon, and Molesworth 2011; Chronis, Arnould, and Hampton 2013). I address these elements in my research.

Consumer research often sees fantasy as fancy-free, entertaining, and pleasurable imagery, thus focusing on its playful, hedonic elements (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982; Campbell 1987; McCraken 1988; Sherry 1990; Belk and Costa 1998; Kozinets 2001; Martin 2004; Molesworth 2006). It is seen as the creation of new worlds, into which consumers can escape and in which they can find the freedom to go beyond what they know and believe (Belk and Costa 1998; Sherry et al. 2001; Kozinets et al. 2004; Martin 2004). Fantasy is strongly associated and almost always linked with entertainment and mass media (Kozinets 2001; Jansson 2002; Martin 2004), as well as the concept of Utopia (Belk and Costa 1998; Hirschman 1988; Kozinets 2001). Through these connotations, fantasy is usually seen as inconsequential and irrational (Jackson 1981; Hume 1984; Armitt 1996). Fantasy is often criticised as being escapist, a distraction from the real world and its problems, and even a danger through seducing individuals from engaging with meaningful *real* relationships (Saler 2012).

In addition to pleasurable entertainment, some consumer research has also noted that fantasy can demonstrate new possibilities and enable agency in consumers' everyday lives (e.g., Belk and Costa 1998; Fernandez and Lastovicka 2011; St. James, Handelman, and Taylor 2011). Through negotiating elements of fantasy and reality, individuals can feel more agentic (Rose and Wood 2005; Stevens and Maclaran 2005; St. James, Handelman and Taylor 2011; Chronis, Arnould, and Hampton 2013). To be more specific, this means that people become more motivated (Rook and Levy 1983), are better at setting and attaining goals (St. James, Handelman, and Taylor 2011), gain enriched experiences (Arnould and Price 1993), as well as cope better with problems (Kozinets et al. 2004). However, it remains unclear how individuals reach and negotiate this agency.

1.2 Researching Fantasy

It becomes evident that fantasy has a strong presence in both everyday life and research. However, while we may have a feel for what fantasy means, the concept does not have a standardised definition or a commonly shared meaning (Klinger 1969; Campbell 1987; Armitt 1996; Traill 1996). Armitt (1996) has proposed that we fail to articulate what fantasy is because its forms are multiple and subjective. I

take on this idea in my research, and explore how fantasy is subjectively experienced in the multiple forms that its performance may take.

Jackson (1981), Jameson (2005), and Illouz (2009) have pointed out that fantasy may be difficult to give value to, as it is often confused with other concepts, such as daydreaming, Utopia, imagination, and entertainment. These concepts are closely linked, as I will show in the following chapters, but they are not interchangeable. Nevertheless, in conducting my literature review, I have used some terms interchangeably, namely make-believe and fancy as being interchangeable with fantasy. In some cases, especially in older texts, fancy has been used to mean fantasy, as historically the two share the same root and meaning (Oxford Dictionary). I also use the terms make-believe and fantasy interchangeably following the work of Walton (1990, 1997), as both concepts are used to mean something perceivably not real. In consumer research, Martin (2004) and Kozinets (2001) have also defined fantasy as make-believe.

While some studies have touched upon fantasy, the concept is still very much under-explored and rarely the direct focus of research (Stevens and Maclaran 2005). Many elements and processes remain unexplained, as I will show later. Fine (1983) wrote that a better understanding of fantasy could provide us with deeper comprehension of our social worlds. Similarly, Arnould, Price, and Otnes (1999) suggest that it is important to understand how fantasy is incorporated into contemporary experiences. Kozinets (2001) as well as Jenkins, Nixon, and Molesworth (2011) note that understanding fantasy can provide new insight into everyday interaction. Exploring how fantasy is experienced and what role it takes in individuals' lives can further aid us in comprehending the role of fantasy in consumption (Jenkins, Nixon, and Molesworth 2011; Chronis, Arnould, and Hampton 2013), in creating meaning and culture (Peñaloza 2001; Hoogland 2002), as well as in relation to entertainment, popular culture, and media (Kozinets 2001; Jansson 2002). This study aims to outline fantasy as subjectively experienced by individuals, as well as to gain a better understanding of its place in everyday life and culture.

In looking at fantasy, research has mostly focused on fantasy as an individual and visual phenomenon of the mind (e.g., Grayson and Martinec 2004; Martin 2004; Rose and Wood 2005; Fernandez and Lastovicka 2011; Jenkins, Nixon and Molesworth 2011). Chronis, Arnould, and Hampton (2013) agree that research has focused too much on fantasy as pleasurable mental imagery, and stress that we need to move beyond this limited understanding. Fantasy appeals not just to our mind and emotions (Hoogland 2002; Illouz 2007), but to all of our senses (Chronis, Arnould, and Hampton 2013). Hoogland (2002) points out that the inner world of individuals is an important part of fantasy, but we can no longer "disregard the flesh" (p. 214). Fantasy is also a bodily phenomenon that is connected to the material world (Joy and Sherry 2003). Moreover, fantasy is not only a personal phenomenon, as it is conditioned by culture and the everyday lives of individuals (Fine 1983), making it a social, communal, and shared process (Schutz 1982; Bakhtin 1984; Fine 1983; Walton 1990; Mackay 2001; Chronis, Arnould, and Hampton 2013). It thus becomes important to locate fantasy as a bodily and

negotiated experience within contemporary culture. This is the perspective I take in this research.

While I aim to stray from the stereotypical view of fantasy as an individual, mental experience, these characteristics are still important parts of fantasy and thus remain central parts of my research. The self is essential in the subjective experience of fantasy (Hume 1984; Minakov 2004; Paskow 2004), as the experience involves the extension of one's awareness (Bakhtin 1984; Jameson 2005). Research has shown that fantasy experiences provide the opportunity to interact with a range of possible selves (Markus and Nurius 1986), fantasy selves (Rook and Levy 1983; Schouten 1991), ideal or completely other selves (Belk and Costa 1998; Bahl and Milne 2010; St. James, Handelman, and Taylor 2011). Rook and Levy (1983) stressed that it is important to gain understanding of the relationship between fantasy and real selves. Kozinets et al. (2004) similarly point out that we are yet to fully understand identity in fantasy contexts. While studies have shown that some sort of negotiation of self or selves goes on within experiences of fantasy, it is still unclear how this process actually occurs and what individuals gain from it.

Fantasy is often described and understood through its relation to reality (Jackson 1981). Nevertheless, it remains unclear how these seemingly opposing elements of reality and fantasy coexist within consumers' lives (Goffman 1974; Grayson and Martinec 2004; Beverland and Farrelly 2010). The relationship between fantasy and reality has been discussed within consumer research, with a majority of research proposing fantasy and reality to be blurred (Peñaloza 1998, 2001; Kozinets 2001; Jansson 2002). Some research has, nevertheless, shown individuals to perceive fantasy and reality as separate (Grayson and Martinec 2004; St. James, Handelman, and Taylor 2011) or negotiated (e.g. Schouten 1991; Kozinets et al. 2004). However, it is still unclear how these processes take place.

Agnew (1986), Kozinets (2001, 2002a), Mackay (2001), and Atwood (2011) have speculated on what the function of fantasy is in regards to reality and everyday life. They raise the following questions: Does fantasy merely reproduce everyday life, thus providing a model for current behaviour and constraining consumers through the repetition of social structures? or, Can fantasy provide emancipation and freedom? Moreover, if fantasy is liberating, does this liberation filter back into our culture and cause a shift, or does it only allow momentary escape? It becomes evident that to grasp the role of fantasy in our everyday lives, an understanding of the relationship of what we perceive as fantasy and reality must be advanced. Consequently, while delving into the more subjective and personal experience of fantasy, I also take a step back and try to see the bigger picture, of which fantasy is a part.

1.3 LARP, Performance, Theatre, and Visual Art

To explore the subjective and negotiated experience of fantasy, I have ethnographically explored the context of live action role-playing games (LARP), which are face-to-face games that allow individuals to take on fantasy characters and engage in fantasy worlds to play out various scenarios. Jansson (2002) has pointed

out that the majority of research dealing directly with the concept of fantasy is theoretical, and more empirical studies focusing on fantasy are needed. Borer (2010) suggests that researchers tend to shy away from researching fantasy, as it is ethereal and ineffable. Studying LARP has allowed me to access the experience of fantasy on a very bodily and almost tangible level, reflecting my research aims well.

To gain a subjective and multi-sided understanding of fantasy, I have taken on the methodology of performance, which is an experience-based approach. Following performance theory, all action and interaction can be seen as performance, that is, behaviour, which is restored out of recombining previously behaved behaviour (Schechner 2006). Understanding is created through acting in and engaging with one's context (Denzin 2003), while reality and the self emerge as the effects of performance (Butler 1990). Performance theory allows the study of social norms and interaction through focusing on individual and social human behaviour (Schechner 1985; McKenzie 2001). It also provides the opportunity to gain a better understanding of how events are deployed in space and time, how events manifest in culture, what material elements are used, what roles individuals take in performance, as well as how events are experienced and oriented (Carlson 2003; Schechner 1988, 2006). According to Conquergood (1991) and Denzin (2003), this approach gives social studies a new focus through giving privilege to the body and through humanising research.

Performance studies originated in the academic world of theatre, and spread into a multitude of fields, such as anthropology, sociology, and literary theory. Performance theory is interdisciplinary and thus somewhat spread out, but has rarely been used in consumer research (some exceptions include Cusack and Digance 2008, Bode 2010). Nevertheless, the widespread application of performance within sociology and media studies has lead me to the conclusion that its use within consumer culture research can greatly aid in understanding consumption experiences connected to fantasy, media, entertainment, and arts.

From the point of view of performance theory, performances are endless series of transformations that adopt various forms, the main categories of which are social and aesthetic performances (Turner 1987; Schechner 2006). The former is perceived to constitute quotidian life, while the latter is seen to have a second order relationship to reality and matter. A central focus of performance theory is understanding how aesthetic and everyday performances interact and exist alongside one another, as well as where one begins and the other ends (Schechner 2006; Carlson 2003). Exploring performances can unveil what individuals perceive as real and imaginary (Schechner 1982; McKenzie 2001), thus, making performance theory ideal for studying fantasy in contemporary culture.

Studying the relationship between social and aesthetic performance as a parallel to reality and fantasy ties in well with my research aims, as the connection between the latter two is central to fantasy. To guide my thinking in exploring aesthetic performance, I turned to one of the only types of aesthetic performance that has remained bodily and active: theatre (Carlson 2003; Schechner 2006). Theatre allows individuals to enter fantasy and become a part of it, as it always requires physical presence and awareness, both for performers *and* spectators

(Carlson 2003). I use theatre literature to guide my understanding and analysis of the research context.

I explored the context of LARP ethnographically. This entailed participant observation, interviews, as well as collection and analysis of relevant objects and texts. In addition to ethnography as a method of qualitative research and analysis, I engaged in art-based research (cf. Leavy 2009; Hannula, Suoranta, and Vaden 2014). I created visual art based on the theory, data, and findings in order to support my research work, and also to provide various perspectives on the phenomena, which I was engaged in. Illistrations of the art pieces are provided throughout the text alongside the passages that they supported the analysis and theorising of. The processes of conducting research and creating art are very similar (Andersson 2009), and the two supported one another, resulting in deeper reflection and analysis.

1.4 Research Aims and Structure

All in all, the aim of this research is to explore the bodily and negotiated experience of fantasy in contemporary culture in order to map its role in consumers' everyday lives and its place in wider cultural practices. I do this through examining how different forms of fantasy performance are created, how they are engaged in, and how they are taken on as a part of consumers' lives. I explore the following research questions:

1) How do individuals engage in fantasy performance?
2) How is fantasy performance linked to the performance of reality, and how are the two differentiated by individuals?
3) What are the different forms in which fantasy performances emerge?

More specifically, based on existing literature, I focused on whether fantasy is purely entertaining, how agency emerges and how it is negotiated as part of fantasy, what the roles of identity and community are as regards fantasy, as well as how space and materiality feed into fantasy. The research questions are visualised in Picture 1.

The structure of this study is the following. First, I provide a literature review of the concept of fantasy and its historical development. Then, I review my theoretical perspective, performance theory, which is followed by descriptions of my research context LARP, as well as the method of data collection and analysis. Next, I thoroughly describe the research context, deconstructing LARP as an aesthetic performance both structurally and experientially. After this I delve deeper into my data through two chapters focusing on findings and discussion. The first chapter focuses on how fantasy is performed, and the second provides a typology of different fantasy experiences. I conclude my study with an overall discussion, in which I present my findings on a more abstract level and connect them to previous research and theory.

Picture 1 "Exploring Fantasy," acrylics on canvas, 60x80cm

2 UNDERSTANDING FANTASY

In the Introduction, I defined fantasy as consciously experiencing something that is perceived not to be real. Such a definition is very vague and, hence, in this chapter I take a closer look at the concept of fantasy as it has been explored in various literatures.

Our intuitive understanding of fantasy is imagery that is unreal and not immediately tangible (Campbell 1987; Schechner 1993; Martin 2004; Atwood 2011). Fantasy is also commonly seen as something individual (Freud 1955; Piaget 1962) that is focused on the pursuit of pleasure (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982; Campbell 1987; McCraken 1988; Sherry 1990; Belk and Costa 1998; Kozinets 2001; Molesworth 2006). More specifically, Zizek (1997) describes the common-sense understanding of fantasy to refer to "indulgence in the hallucinatory realization of desires" (p. 13). However, as I will show, the concept is not as straightforward as it seems.

The concept of fantasy often goes undefined in literature. Nevertheless, a few studies focusing on the topic have tried to provide definitions. Todorov (1970) has described fantasy as hesitation in confronting something supernatural. Irwin (1976) presented fantasy as the establishment and development of an impossibility. Tolkien (1964) wrote that fantasy is "the making or glimpsing of Otherworlds" (p. 41). Jackson (1981) sees fantasy as the desire toward something that is absent. Fantasy is thus often defined through its relationship to reality (Jackson 1981), and is described either as secluded from or opposite to anything real (Hume 1984).

Consumer research often describes fantasy as the creation of new worlds, which involve the freedom of going beyond the limitations of what is known and believed (Sherry et al. 2001; Kozinets et al. 2004; Martin 2004). Individuals have learned to place their wants, goals, and desires in this realm (Campbell 1987; Sherry 1990; Schechner 1993; Martin 2004), which becomes a place of escape and refuge, separate from the real world (Belk and Costa 1998; Kozinets et al. 2004; Martin 2004) and associated with themes of mass media (Kozinets 2001; Martin 2004). The focus of consumer research has thus been on the fancy-free temporary emancipation created by fantasy, which is experienced only individually within one's mind (Martin 2004; Illouz 2009). As a side effect, a negative connotation of the concept of fantasy persists, causing it to be seen as childish, unserious, frivolous, and almost shameful in its irrationality and unproductivity (Tolkien 1964; Jackson 1981; Hume 1984; Walton 1990; Bammer 1991; Armitt 1996).

Dictionaries, similarly, tend to present fantasy as something strongly opposing fact, reality, and truth, with the definitions also being closely connected to imagination. The Oxford Dictionary defines fantasy as "the faculty or activity of imagining impossible or improbable things," adding that it can also be "the product of this faculty or activity", or "an idea with no basis in reality". The Merriam-Webster dictionary, on the other hand, presents fantasy as "the free play of creative imagination, a creation of the imaginative faculty whether expressed or merely conceived, the power or process of creating especially unrealistic or improbable mental images in response to psychological need." Lastly, Princeton University's Dictionary seemingly equates fantasy with imagination, defining it as "imagination unrestricted by reality", "illusion", and "something many people believe that is false". In a similar manner, varying research has presented fantasy as connected to imagination. Fantasy has also been presented to be a secondary elaboration (Coleridge 1906; Jameson 2005), an expression (Martin 2004), the evoking of (Illouz 2009), an exercise, activity, and originator (Mackay 2001), as well as the extension and discussion of imagination (Fine 1983).

Fantasy is traditionally associated with imagery. Campbell (1987), for instance, describes fantasy as the imagery, which is allowed to develop because of the pleasure that it yields without taking into consideration the constraints of reality. In theatre studies, Chekhov (1995) explains fantasy to be the combination of imagery in non-realistic ways. In this vein, consumer research generally describes fantasy as a visual, image-based phenomenon, often linking it to popular culture (Kozinets 2001; Grayson and Martinec 2004; Martin 2004; Rose and Wood 2005; Fernandez and Lastovicka 2011; Jenkins, Nixon, and Molesworth 2011).

Jackson (1981) and Armitt (1996) have stressed that fantasy has no correct absolute meaning, as it is a contextual and shifting phenomenon. Similarly, Hume (1984) rejects any general definition of fantasy, describing it rather as an impulse. Fantasy could thus be better understood as a sensitising concept (Blumer 1954), that is, a concept that does not refer directly to a class of objects through the aid of clear attributes or fixed benchmarks. A sensitising concept gives a general sense of reference and guidance in approaching empirical instances. It suggests directions along which to look, and a general sense of what is relevant, which can be grounded and articulated through illustrations (Blumer 1954). I thus aim to explore and describe fantasy, rather than define it.

In this chapter, I explore the complex notion of fantasy through a literature review. I begin by discussing various concepts and processes that have been linked to or even used interchangeably with the concept of fantasy (Klinger 1971; Jackson 1981; Jameson 2005; Illouz 2009). Mapping out definitions and descriptions of these concepts, as well as connecting and contrasting them to fantasy creates a basis for understanding fantasy itself. After that, I provide an overview of the more inclusive and flexible perspectives on fantasy, as well as the forms that fantasy has been proposed to take.

2.1 Fantasy and Imagination

As I already exemplified, definitions of fantasy usually connect it in one way or another to imagination, sometimes even using the two interchangeably. Imagination is typically identified as the perceptions and faculties not embedded in materiality (McLuhan 1962), and the process of conceiving something not existing (Stanislavski 1989) or directly experienced (Tolkien 1964). Imagination is a natural, essential, and defining part of human beings (Tolkien 1964; Bammer 1991; Hinerman 1992; Levy 1998), as it creates meanings and supports social interaction (Sartre 1940; Tolkien 1964; Schechner 1988, 1993; Scott 1994; Hinerman 1992).

Imagination, however, is elusive because it is too perfect in its unreal essence (Campbell 1987). Imagination is not in itself conceivable (Artaud 1974), as it is something not yet conceived by the symbolic order (Jackson 1981). Imagination has no determination, duration, or force to act (Sartre 1940). Neither is imagination a process of perception, because it cannot be observed objectively (Sartre 1940). There is no "other" imaginary world, but this does not mean that imagination does not exist (Tolkien 1964; Artaud 1974). Imagination continuously tends towards embodiment in order to be understood (Levy 1998), but also continuously evades that embodiment (Eco 1973). In order to be understood, shared, and discussed among people, imagination needs to be extended (Fine 1983), that is, connected to things already known to us (Eco 1973; Walton 1990).

Tolkien (1964) proposed that fantasy works as an operative link to imagination, expressing that which is not or is not yet existing in what we experience as reality. Following these ideas, Armitt (1996) describes fantasy to be the secondary elaboration of imagination. Wolfe (1982) further explains that individuals are in control of fantasy, but not imagination, to which the former leads. Similarly, Coleridge (1906) proposed that fantasy echoes imagination and makes it understandable to us through its use of fixed and determined concepts. Jameson (2005) explains Coleridge's concepts of imagination and fantasy to be analogous to a wish and its elaboration. He further traces Coleridge's ideas to be derived from Kant's (1952) beauty and sublime, which I will touch upon in the context of art and aesthetics.

Fantasy could then be described as a secondary elaboration of imagination through the use of elements understandable to us. However, this is still a process that is not committed to actuality or materiality and goes beyond them (Tolkien 1964; Artaud 1974; Boruah 1988). Fantasy points to something that is not there and resists being a part of the symbolic order (Zizek 1992). Tolkien (1964) believed fantasy to express something not of the "primary world", that is, the world we perceive as reality, but to have an inner consistency of reality. Fantasy balances the nature of imagination and the nature of material existence (Artaud 1974) by going towards that which is unknown and does not exist, and connecting it to the reality that we perceive and understand (Boruah 1988; Stanislavski 1989). Fantasy strives to present the impossible (Zizek 1997), projecting imagination into an activity (Cohen and Taylor 1976).

2.2 Fantasy and Utopia

Fantasy has inclinations to idealise and reach for Utopia (Todorov 1970; Armitt 1996). Consumer research often connects fantasy to Utopia, describing the latter as an ideal or a space that consumers can engage with and travel to through fantasy activities (e.g., Kozinets 2001, 2002a; Rose and Wood 2005). Utopia is commonly understood as an imagined place that is better and perfect (Noble 2009), which would imply that it represents something flawless and ideal. In consumer research, Utopia is similarly often conceptualised as a perfect, ideal world (Podoshen, Venkatesh, and Jin 2014) or a liberating force promising a brighter future (Maclaran and Brown 2005). Very modern in its nature, the idea of Utopia with its focus on a grand future with a better life for all of us underlines contemporary Western culture (Firat 2001; Noble 2009). "Utopia is a powerful trope in western culture," says Noble (2009, p.12). Jameson (1979) proposed that striving for Utopia underlines any consumption, especially consumption of entertainment.

While often used interchangeably with something idealised, Utopia literally means "no place": it is both being and not being a place, infinite and inevitable in its disappearance (Suvin 1979; Dolan 2005). The concept of Utopia has become imbued with too much positive meaning in the contemporary world (Dolan 2005). Fantasy could never become Utopia or exist within it in the way that consumer research might suggest exactly because Utopia is a perfect fantasy, which cannot be reached, expressed, perceived, or even imagined (Tolkien 1964; Jameson 2005). Locating Utopia in something material and concrete shatters its idealisation (Noble 2009; Atwood 2011). Any Utopia that we can conceive is already dead, as it neutralises its own power by presuming shared assumptions (Bammer 1991; Armitt 1996) and incapacitates itself with its perfection and conservatism (Bammer 1991; Jameson 2005).

Utopia is perfect, but it is not separate from our world or from human nature (Suvin 1979). Rooted in its social context, Utopia expects people to agree on it, leaving no room for change or innovation (Armitt 1996; Jameson 2005). It is a defeated and incapacitated act of consumption, which also destroys the fantasy connected to it (Jameson 2005). In line with these ideas, Maclaran and Brown (2005) have proposed that Utopia is no longer possible in the contemporary world because it is compromised by consumer culture and commercialism. As a result, Utopia is no longer possible as a grand social vision, and possibly emerges only as a small-scale, individual, and personally enriching "youtopia" that takes form in daydreams, myths, fairy stories, fine art, film, theatre, and television programs (Kozinets 2002a; Maclaran and Brown 2005).

To create hope and a will for change, fantasy does not need to be optimistic, futuristic, or even flawless in the way that Utopia would require. Instead of Utopia, Bammer (1991) proposes that we should rather turn our gaze to the *Utopian,* a process of radical alternative; a protest, negation, and reorganisation of reality, which shows us possibilities (Bammer 1991; Dolan 2005; Jameson 2005). It is the "not yet" of our desires that cannot be articulated or brought into focus, continuously going beyond its limits and out of the grasp of our full perception (Suvin 1979; Bammer 1991; Dolan 2005). The lack of clarity and linearity gives the

Utopian its brand of irrationality and uselessness, similar to the stigma of fantasy. Simultaneously, this partial vision of the Utopian gives it its power by creating a longing for a better world and a belief in its possibility (Bammer 1991; Jameson 2005). While Utopia describes a place, Utopian narratives focus on the transport to another place (Bammer 1991; Atwood 2011). They provide a movement *toward* the non-place that does not give answers, but rather opens them up (Bammer 1991).

Consumer research often idealises fantasy, and sees it to be a part of or occurring within Utopia (Belk and Costa 1998; Kozinets 2002a; Rose and Wood 2005). Such ideas seem to deny Utopian processes (Armitt 1996), and sustain the stigma of irrational, fancy-free fantasy. The Utopian can nevertheless serve as a useful tool for understanding fantasy's creation of hope and possibility, as it is capable of showing people elements that they do not ordinarily notice or perceive (Bammer 1991; Dolan 2005; Jameson 2005). In addition to rousing thoughts, the Utopian opens up agency that actively drives individuals to create (Bammer 1991; Dolan 2005). Creative processes are not predetermined here, allowing the reconfiguration of typical responses, the transformation of ideas, and the formation of new qualities for well-established phenomena (Levy 1998). This impels individuals to escape temporal, spatial, and social boundaries, allowing people to reach for that which they ordinarily cannot or dare not (Hume 1984; Bammer 1991; Levy 1998). I would suggest that, through the Utopian, fantasy is able to spill over its form and propel itself toward the unknown.

Utopian's lack of clarity can, nevertheless, easily turn into the consumption of unreachable perfection (Bammer 1991). For its possibilities to become more than just ideas, the Utopian has to become a part of reality and bound to existing conceptual structures (Bammer 1991; Jameson 2005). However, the Utopian resists realisation, and it is never perceived fully (Bammer 1991). What we are able to perceive and communicate is never the Utopian itself, but a process of interpreting the possibilities that are presented by our incomplete vision of it (Bammer 1991). Relating to the above discussion on imagination, I would suggest that this incomplete vision is experienced through fantasy.

2.3 Fantasy and Nostalgia

Another concept that often arises in relation to fantasy is nostalgia. Armitt (1995) and Cramer (2010) propose that at the core of all fantasy there is a desperate need to return to origins. While such a return may no longer be possible, as I will show next, nostalgia and its impulses seem to remain a strong part of fantasy (following Armitt 1996). For a visualisation of the development of the concept of nostalgia, see Picture 2.

Originally a spatial phenomenon of longing for one's home in far-away places, nostalgia developed into a temporal ambivalence that values and longs for the irrecoverable past. The present is marked as unsatisfactory, inadequate, and lacking the values of the past, which have become lost. It is important to note that temporal nostalgia is not a memory, but rather a way of relating to the past through

the present. Moreover, just like its predecessor, temporal nostalgia is often connected to spatial or material elements, but focuses on the wistful longing for their past meanings that can never be returned to (Jameson 1991; Higson 2014).

Following Jameson (1991), contemporary nostalgia looses both its temporal and spatial aspects. It becomes atemporal in the sense that it is focused on the past, but this is a past that is in the present and thus out of time altogether. Eco (1973) and Armitt (1996) further suggest that this creates a fantasy experience that has a dialogue with the past that has never existed. Higson (2014) stresses that, unlike temporal and spatial nostalgia, contemporary nostalgia becomes attainable, as it was never actually lost. Nostalgia retains feelings of lack and loss, but these can be filled. Thus, the experience never becomes wistful or melancholic.

Contemporary idealistic nostalgia is attainable through consumption, becoming mass-produced and intertwined with popular culture (Higson 2014). It is a journey home, not just a wish for it. However, all this nostalgia creates is a feeling of static values and meanings that cannot develop or transform (Schroeder and Borgerson 2003). Instead of the simple and ordered past of temporal nostalgia, we are faced with a past that is ambiguous and complex for us, as it is no longer separated from the present (Blanchette 2014).

Picture 2 Nostalgia Parts I-III: "Spatial Dissonance," "Temporal Ambivalence," "Marketed Memory;" acrylics on canvas and mixed media, 50x50cm x 3

Based on these ideas, I would suggest that Utopia and nostalgia are not so different from one another, as both present a rejection of and a need to escape the here and now in order to create a new, alternative, idealised world and identity. Similar to nostalgia, Utopia involves a certain feeling of loss, dread, and melancholy that pushes fantasy towards possibility and into action (Armitt 1996; Dolan 2005). Nostalgia, on the other hand, can create new meanings and aims at escaping the normative, limited, and unsatisfactory present in order to search for new possibilities, thus inclining towards Utopic ideas (Blanchette 2014). Nostalgia and Utopia can then be said to be very similar processes, with one inclining towards the past and the other towards the future. Both have the capability of pushing fantasy into action if escapist inclinations are relinquished, but also have a serious risk of letting fantasy slip into illusion and static norms. It is important to note that nostalgia's urge towards escapism is driven by a need to elude the present, not reality itself. This could also mean that the escapist aim of fantasy is to evade the here and now, rather than reality altogether.

2.4 Fantasy, Desire, and Dreaming

It has become evident so far that fantasy involves the desire for something not yet defined by the symbolic order (Jackson 1981), be it for imagination, nostalgia, or Utopia. Imagination, in itself, is not conceivable, as it is too perfect and thus out of reach of our articulation (Artaud 1974; Campbell 1987). Nevertheless, individuals are motivated by their conscious and unconscious desires to strive for imagination, which holds a promise of ideals, purpose, and a sense of meaning (Tolkien 1964; Jackson 1981; Hume 1984).

The idea of fantasy as desire is widely discussed in psychology literature (e.g., Vaillant 1977). Psychoanalysis has taken an especial interest in fantasy (often with the spelling phantasy), defining it as an "imaginary scene in which the subject is a protagonist, representing the fulfilment of a wish in a manner that is distorted to a greater or lesser extent by defensive processes" (Laplanche and Pontalis 1973, p. 314). Laing (1961) provides an overview of the concept of fantasy from the point of view of psychoanalysis. He postulates that fantasy is the content of unconscious mental processes that represent actual aims and desires that are directed toward objects. Following Freud (1955; Breuer and Freud 2000), fantasy is seen here as the psychic representative of instincts, which become "hallucinatory wish-fulfilment" (Laing 1961). Fantasy is then focused on imagining or picturing the self, as well as the realisation and satisfaction of desire, either known or unknown to the subject (Freud 1955; Laplanche and Pontalis 1973; Lacan 1991; Jackson 1981; Breuer and Freud 2000). However, fantasy is not merely pleasure giving, but emerges as the repressed tensions, anxieties as well as unconscious fears and desires of a cultural continuity of a specific context (Hume 1984; Jackson 1981; Armitt 1996).

Zizek (1989) has noted that defining fantasy as "an imagined scenario representing the realization of desire" (p. 118) is perhaps a misleading notion, because it makes no mention of where the object of desire is derived from. Consequently, Zizek (1989; 1992; 1997) proposes that, in addition to being a scene for and satisfaction of desire, fantasy is also its staging and constitution. Fantasy creates objects of desire and teaches us how to desire, thus supporting the symbolic order of our society (Zizek 1997).

As it not only creates but also drives conscious and unconscious desires, fantasy plays a key role in our economy and society (Zizek 1989; Armitt 1996). Fantasy traces the unseen and unsaid of our selves and our culture (Jackson 1981), developing undifferentiated and conceited desire into well-articulated and conscious concerns of the everyday world through reflection and expression (Lacan 1991; Armitt 1996). Consumers' wants and tastes become manifested in fantasy, enabling experiences otherwise unavailable or unattainable (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982; Deighton 1992; Peñaloza 2001; Martin 2004). As a result, fantasy becomes essential to consumption, as it aids in generating, understanding, and pursuing individuals' wants and wishes (Campbell 1987; Sherry 1990; Arnould, Price, and Otnes 1999).

Campbell (1987) proposed that fantasy always involves the creation of convincing daydreams, into which consumers place their desires and to which they react as though they would be real. In this way, desire is strengthened and made

more pleasurable, but its consummation becomes disillusioning, as the fantasy is perfect, but the reality never lives up to the standards. Therefore, the longing created through fantasy is never extinguished, but constantly regenerated, leaving the consumer in a permanent state of dissatisfaction and yearning for something better (Campbell 1987). To reach the desire is to close the gap between the ideal and the real, destroying fantasy's nature as well as its ability for change and transgression (Campbell 1987). Desire has thus become locked between its consummation and possibility through the mixing of the reality of experience and the unreality of anticipated desire (Campbell 1987; Sherry 1990; Martin 2004; Illouz 2009). This links back to the discussion on nostalgia and Utopia.

Psychoanalysis further tends to equate fantasy with dreaming through their shared process of immersion in the impossible as if it were real (Freud 1955). As a reaction to Freud, Klinger (1971) explains that dreaming and fantasy may be functionally similar, but the two are very different processes, with the latter being conscious, under the individual's direct control, and exceeding mere mental activity. Dreams are always partially beyond conscious cognition, becoming a static screen for an individual to observe (Armitt 1996). Fantasy, while capable of completely capturing us, is never mistaken for reality (Tolkien 1964). It is an interactive process of production subject to will, elaboration, and revision (Armitt 1996). Losing this reflexive aspect would spin fantasy out of control, causing it to collapse, perish, and become a delusion (Tolkien 1964; Boruah 1988). Walton (1990) has a more positive outlook on dreaming, proposing it to be fantasy without props or objects from our real world. However, Paskow (2004) stresses that it is exactly without such aids that we lose sight of fantasy and are no longer able to reflect on it, making it delusional.

2.5 Fantasy and Reality

From a common-sense perspective, fantasy is typically thought of as opposite to and exclusive of reality (Tolkien 1964; Walton 1990). Paramount reality is understood by individuals as everyday life; the natural and physical possible world; an understanding that envelops perceptions, senses, and relationships (Cohen and Taylor 1976; Traill 1996; Paskow 2004). Fantasy, on the other hand, is commonly understood as physically not existing or even impossible (Stanislavski 1989; Traill 1996; Paskow 2004), a secondary world (Tolkien 1964). In fact, fantasy threatens the fragile illusion of reality, as it is meaningless within the terms and structures of the former (Berger and Luckmann 1966). Fantasy, in today's world, is believed to be in opposition to scientific and rational thought, that is, the ontologically supreme reality. Fantasy is seen as naïve, illogical, and separate from what is "normal" (St. James, Handelman, and Taylor 2011).

In the previous section, I showed that consumer culture continuously exhorts individuals to regenerate and create new desires, making the process never-ending. As I will explain in detail in the next chapter, through creating these desires, fantasy becomes a part of our identities, slowly replacing reality. Fantasy fills in the empty space created by the symbolic order of our everyday lives, hiding the fact

that the order is structured around a void and an impossibility. Consequently, the difference between reality and fantasy becomes so blurred that we are unable to distinguish between the two (Lacan 1991; Zizek 1997). The two transcend into abstractions, making the difference between them arbitrary and meaningless. Following this line of thought, Baudrillard (1972, 1983, 1987) proposed that there are perceivably no more clear-cut concepts of fantasy and reality, as individuals recognise that both are subjectively constructed. The distinction of what is real and what is not vanishes, creating one blurry operational totality of hyperreality, that is, the collapse of reality into signs and representations through cultural fragmentation and multiplication with no links to truths of reality (Baudrillard 1972, 1983, 1987). Consumers thus no longer see fantasy and reality as meaningful categories (Baudrillard 1995; Grayson and Martinec 2004). People could be said to be living in an indistinguishable blur of fantasy and reality created by the media-driven social environment they live in (following Deighton 1992; Peñaloza 2001; Kozinets 2001; Fernandez and Lastovicka 2011).

Hustvedt points out in an interview with Tomaselli (2010) that "distinguishing between the imaginary and the real is ultimately impossible" (p. 221). All reality is thus illusory, a "fragile, symbolic cobweb" (Zizek 1992, p. 17). The institution that we understand as reality, along with meaning, knowledge, action, and interaction come to exist in the social imaginary, that is, the symbolic dimension of the social world. We are, however, unable to perceive it as imaginary, because we are born into and brought up within it (Sartre 1940; Appadurai 1996; Levy 1998).

If fantasy and reality are both general agreements, one becomes no more real than the other (Artaud 1974; Hume 1984; Butler 1997; Levy 1998). Consumer culture research mostly embraces this perspective of hyperreality (e.g., Grayson and Shulman 2000; Kozinets 2001; Peñaloza 2001; Kozinets et al. 2004). However, a number of studies have shown consumers to perceive fantasy and reality as separate entities (Grayson and Martinec 2004; Rose and Wood 2005; St. James, Handelman, and Taylor 2011), which would suggest that hyperreality only holds true from a detached point of view (Scott 1993; Grayson and Martinec 2004). Firat (1991; 2001; Firat and Venkatesh 1995; Firat and Dholakia 2006) has thoroughly theorised the blurring of fantasy and reality, stressing that this blurring does not mean that people can no longer discern the two (Firat 2001).

Berger and Luckmann (1966) explain that the reality of everyday life, which is "here and now", is normally seen as paramount and thus has a privileged position in the way individuals order and apprehend their lives. Hence, as Zizek (1992) points out, something is real only because we treat it as such or act it out as such, which creates an illusion of always having been there. This is necessary in order to uphold social order and a sense of normality. Everything becomes a hyperreal totality, but individuals may still encounter objects or events that are out of place in this order of things and thus experience these as unreal (Zizek 1992). While fantasy and reality are not exclusive domains and are essentially indistinguishable from an objective point of view (Martin 2004), individuals continue to make subjective, yet very clear distinctions concerning them on a social and personal level (Suvin 1988; Firat 1991; Armitt 1996; Grayson and Martinec 2004).

Fantasy may have become equal to reality in the contemporary context (Jameson 2005), but the two are not equivalent. Positing fantasy as indistinguishable from reality would make it loose its sense and its nature (Sartre 1940; Tolkien 1964; Todorov 1970; Martin 2004; Illouz 2009), because it is by marking it off that we create fantasy's power and function (Brecht 1965; Leach 2008). Fantasy can become meaningful, important, and authentic to individuals (Hirschman 1988; Belk and Costa 1998; Grayson and Shulman 2000; Rose and Wood 2005), but its nature requires a certain level of conscious difference from reality (Tolkien 1964; Todorov 1970; Martin 2004; Illouz 2009). At the same time, reality is never perceived as imaginary by its beholders, even though norms differ significantly from culture to culture (Bonsu and Belk 2003). The experiences of fantasy and reality thus become similar, but their difference remains in the subjective value of and attitude toward the experience (Firat 2001).

Even though subjectively experienced as different, the concepts of fantasy and reality always exist in a relationship of co-dependence. Fantasy does not emerge spontaneously or exist in limbo, but always connects to and extends what we know and believe to be present in our reality (Tolkien 1964; Fine 1983; Saler 2012). Fantasy is always furnished by reality, as, for us to understand it and take it seriously within its context, fantasy needs to be connected to our real concerns (Todorov 1970; Jackson 1981; Paskow 2004). An inner consistency and a seeming logic are created through connecting it to a subjective understanding of reality, social knowledge, and experience (Fine 1983; Stanislavski 1989; Schechner 1993; Chekhov 1995). Through this, fantasy becomes more realistic, sustaining its believability and credibility, but never becoming actual (Stanislavski 1989). Fantasy is thus understood through its connection to shared experience (Eco 1973), expectations, and conventions (Suvin 1988), but is also highly limited through these constructs (Fine 1983). Cultural scripts and real-world problems invade fantasy (Jenkins, Nixon, and Molesworth 2011), and fantasy becomes very much restrained by the "real" world and social conventions (Fine 1983). Linking back to fantasy's relationship to imagination, fantasy could be said to exist at the "hinterland between 'real' and 'imaginary', shifting the relations between them through its indeterminacy" (Jackson 1981, p. 35).

Reality and fantasy become very blurry concepts, the difference between them being extremely vague, ambiguous, and contextual (Lefebvre 1991; Traill 1996; Paskow 2004); typically a question of shared knowledge (Butler 2004) and intuition (Hume 1984). However, as their subjective difference remains, understanding their relationship as a part of individuals' lives continues to be a relevant endeavour. Following Firat's (1991) work, fantasy could be seen as a different type of attitude to reality. However, how does this attitude differ from experiencing reality? How do individuals engage in and perceive it? How is the distinction between reality and fantasy made by individuals? To explore these ideas, we need to forget about objective and subjective reality altogether, as it is unattainable (Ezzy 2008), and concentrate on the personally felt authenticity of experiences that endows them with the characteristic of being real or not (Beverland and Farrelly 2010). Moreover, if an interplay of the seemingly opposing elements is occurring, we must then go past the view of fantasy and reality as separate entities which are

being blended, blurred, or negotiated, and turn our attention rather to their relationship as well as its performance in consumers' lives.

2.6 Fantasy, Belief, and Make-Believe

Fantasy is commonly thought of as something very illogical and unreasonable, in direct contradiction to and separate from the rational thought of the ontologically supreme reality (Tolkien 1964; Boruah 1988; Beverland and Farrelly 2010; St. James, Handelman, and Taylor 2011). In this line of thought, everything associated with fantasy, including its perception and belief, is imagined and is not in contact with the cognition and emotion of "reality" (Scruton 1971; Radford 1975, in Radford and Weston 1975). Belief, which can be defined as "a pronouncement that something exists in reality" (St. James, Handelman, and Taylor 2011), cannot thus be a part of fantasy experiences.

Despite the fact that fantasy is deemed irrational, people continue to interact with it, to believe in it, and to have experiences based on it (Boruah 1988). Numerous research has shown that fantasy is clearly capable of causing strong experiences equal and even superior to those of everyday life (see Suvin 1972; Eco 1973; Holbrook and Hirschman 1982; Belk and Costa 1998; Deighton 1992; Kozinets 2001; Mackay 2001; Kozinets et al. 2004; St. James, Handelman, and Taylor 2011; Waskul 2006). Wolfe (1982) stresses that belief is a core aspect of fantasy. In fact, fantasy is often described as the act of make-belief, that is, of making belief (Tolkien 1964; Irwin 1976; Wolfe 1982; Walton 1990; Yanal 1999).

The fields of art, aesthetics, and literature studies have articulated the above concerns through the "paradox of belief in fiction", originally put forward by Radford (1975, in Radford and Weston 1975) and Weston (1975, in Radford and Weston 1975). As I will show in more detail in the next chapter, fiction is intrinsically tied into the concept of fantasy. The paradox of belief is based on three points: 1) people experience emotions towards things they take to be fictions, 2) emotion is experienced only if the object of emotion is believed to exist and exhibit emotion inducing properties, 3) people do not believe that fiction exists or exhibits emotion inducing properties.

The resolution to this paradox has been highly disputed, creating different streams of thought. Radford (1975, in Radford and Weston 1975) himself proposed a rationalist approach, following which the answer to the paradox simply lies in the fact that people find any response to fiction to be irrational. This idea was highly criticised and was not espoused by any followers (Yanal 1999). Boruah (1988) argued that responses to fiction cannot be irrational, as they are non-rational, that is, outside the normative and evaluative rationality of everyday life. Moreover, Yanal (1999) points out that fiction can easily be consistent and coherent, which are central aspects of being rational. Similarly, it is possible for fantasy to be authentic, consistent, and logical (Rose and Wood 2005), even as it can never be objectively legitimate or fake (Tolkien 1964; Beverland and Farrelly 2010).

Weston (1975, in Radford and Weston 1975) had a factualist approach to the paradox and suggested that, when interacting with fiction, we do not actually

respond to people and elements we perceive to be in the make-believe world. The object of our response is rather an actuality that is called to mind through the fiction. These can be either analogous real-life objects or more general truths of life. A development of factualism further proposes that we direct fictional emotion at nothing (Gendler and Kovakovich 2006). Yanal (1999) believes this approach to be reductionist, pointing out that individuals clearly experience a connection to the fictional worlds and to the characters themselves, and not their real-life counterparts.

Proposing 'thought theory' to resolve the paradox, Lamarque (1981) believed that an emotional response does not require belief at all, as thought and belief are separate entities. He continues that individuals' reactions to fantasy are identical to those caused by real-life beliefs, but are rather sparked off by imagination. Yanal (1999) shares this point of view, but adds that in addition to or in place of imagination, emotional response to fantasy can be created through the intense involvement, reflection, and attention given to it. Belief or reference then becomes unnecessary, as the engagement is what creates a response.

Scruton's (1974) solution to the paradox was that people have modes of acceptance and types of thinking besides belief. He proposed that when not asserted, perception and belief are imagination. Following this line of thought, Walton (1978, 1990) proposed that make-believe worlds are created around fiction and props. These make-believe worlds involve fictional truths and fictional responses, which both lack seriousness and do not have the power to create action. Consequently, people do not feel real emotions or have real beliefs when interacting with make-believe. Fantasy rather generates quasi-belief and quasi-emotions, which mirror, but are secondary to their real-life counterparts (Walton 1978). Following Walton's arguments, Yanal (1999) and Paskow (2004) point out that quasi-belief is not a pretence belief or a half-belief; it is parallel to and undifferentiated from the "real" beliefs of individuals experiencing them. This results in there being no difference in quality of beliefs and quasi-beliefs, emotion and quasi-emotion. While quasi-belief does not fully explain the emergence of belief in the context of fantasy, it is clear that individuals differentiate belief in fantasy and belief in reality (Boruah 1988; Walton 1990; Yanal 1999; Paskow 2004).

Combining the ideas of difference in the type of belief as well as the important role of imagination, Boruah (1988) proposed that belief in reality and belief in fantasy have different existential commitments. Within fantasy, existential belief is replaced by imagination, breaking the binding tie to materiality and reality. Fantasy has evaluative content, which has essence and is valuable to the individual, but does not need to have links to physical existence or be rational (Boruah 1988). Boruah (1988) continues that emotions and desires created in such a context do not include materialised actions or their realisation, which results in "stirred inactivity", that is, a passive response. Belief in the context of fantasy thus does not imply being an irrational individual and believing in the mysterious, but rather having a different attitude towards the possible and a different commitment to actuality. This bears similarity to Firat's (1991; 2001) suggestions of fantasy being a different attitude to experience.

Another stream of thought aimed at resolving the paradox was put into motion by Coleridge's (1906) ideas of "suspension of disbelief". In this often-sited theory, Coleridge suggested that fantasy contexts do not entail belief, but rather the suspension and inactivation of disbelief. Following his thoughts, Gendler and Kovakovich (2006), propose that reactions to make-believe are both genuine and rational, but we merely momentarily fail to believe them to be fictional. Fine (1983) similarly describes individuals choosing to forget certain information when engaging in fantasy experiences. However, Boruah (1988) argues that the suspension of disbelief would result in paralysis of our capabilities of judgement. It would cause us to forget that we are observing fantasy, completely breaking down its very nature. Weinberg and Meskin (2006) also wonder how we can still know about the real world if we take our belief system "offline". As a possible resolution, Badiou (1990) has suggested that perhaps fantasy does not suspend belief, but rather suspends the everyday state of affairs.

Tolkien (1964) and Saler (2012) also heavily criticised Coleridge's suspension of disbelief, suggesting that it is inadequate in describing the deep emotional and intellectual investment that takes place during interaction with fantasy. Saler (2012) continues that Coleridge's ideas reflect an ambivalence in the power and pleasure that fantasy can entail, and such an approach tries to intentionally limit fantasy in fear of its threat to the rational order of a modern world. Rousseau (1979) pointed out that, in a modern world, reality has limits, but imagination does not; as the former cannot be enlarged, the latter is restricted by reason in order to keep it in check (Saler 2012). In contrast to the idea of suspension of disbelief, Rousseau proposed that we rather start off with a position of scepticism in the misleading and distorting fantasy world, and then suspends this disbelief in order to engage with fantasy. However, as I have already shown, to become comprehendible to us, fantasy needs to be "translated" into paramount reality of everyday life (Berger and Luckmann 1966). Fantasy worlds are very rational, logical, and coherent, because they would be unappealing to individuals without an inner consistency that is similar to reality (Tolkien 1964).

Saler (2012) proposes that we do not willingly suspend belief, but rather willingly believe with a double awareness of pretence. This is based on the work of Tolkien (1964), who argued that we can simultaneously believe in and be aware of something fictional. Disbelief, in this case, breaks the enchantment with a different world, stifling the experience. Tolkien proposed that reality is the Primary World and entails Primary belief, while fantasy is a Secondary World that requires Secondary belief, which involves both complete immersion in and an ironic distance to fantasy. Following these ideas, Tolkien believed fantasy to actually be *more* rational than reality, as Secondary belief is always based on the Primary World, but is more committed and immersive. Saler (2012) sides with Tolkien, calling the experience of interacting with fantasy "ironic imagination", that is, a double-minded consciousness, which permits emotional immersion and rational reflection, thus delighting without deluding. Paskow (2004) similarly suggests that when we engage with fiction, we become aware of the process functioning on two levels of awareness: being within fiction and seeing into the fiction. He continues that, as we are interacting with the object of fiction, we never lose this dual con-

sciousness, because it is the distance that constantly reminds us that fantasy is not reality. As I will show in the following chapters, many of my findings support the ideas of Saler, Tolkien, and Paskow on the paradox of belief.

All in all, it becomes evident that theories trying to solve the paradox of belief are focused on whether emotions involved in the experience are real or not real, whether the object of these feelings is real or not real, and whether emotions use or even need belief to be experienced (following Yanal 1999). However, as Walton (1990) points out, it does not really matter whether the objects of or the reactions to fiction are real or not, as we still experience them. Carroll (1998) stresses that it rather becomes important to find out how the two differ experientially and subjectively. This is what I set out to do in my research.

2.7 Fantasy and Entertainment Media

Fantasy is often equated to leisure (e.g., Rojek 1995) and especially to the entertainment that takes form in its namesake genre; a genre that has become highly popular and mass-marketed, developing from fairy tales to television, film, video games, and all other media (Suvin 1988; Armitt 1996; Copier 2005; Jameson 2005). Moreover, fantasy is often linked to media consumption in general (Kozinets 2001; Green, Brock, and Kaufman 2004). In fact, one of the ways the Oxford Dictionary defines fantasy is "a genre of imaginative fiction involving magic and adventure, especially in a setting other than the real world." While contemporary fantasy is much more than entertainment and literary fiction, these are intrinsically linked, as I will show in more detail through my review of the historical development of the concept.

Fantasy as a genre is traditionally associated with medieval content, Renaissance forms, magic, as well as the clear binary of good and evil (Armitt 1996; Mackay 2001). These characteristics have been perpetuated by large entertainment companies, such as Disney (Fjellman 1992). However, with the blurring and mixing of genres, it has been suggested that the fantasy genre has become indistinguishable from such categories as myth, fairy tale, science fiction, or horror (Jameson 2005). Contemporary fantasy has become an unexpected combination of styles, which reflect our society at a particular moment (Eco 1973; Jones 1999; Jameson 2005). Consumer research largely reflects the idea of intertwined and indistinguishable fantasy genres, defining fantasy as being set within re-mythologised contexts ranging from medieval mythology to futuristic science fiction (Kozinets 2001; Martin 2004).

Considerable debate surrounds the idea of delineating fantasy from other closely related genres. Most notably, fantasy is juxtaposed with science fiction. Supporters of this division claim that fantasy is a mere idealistic omission of constraints and fabrication of power, which is past oriented, located outside of society, and results in a lack of plausibility or testability. Science fiction, on the other hand, becomes superior to fantasy in its focus on the exploration of human constraints, its future orientation, as well as its neutral, passive, and scientific approach that allows objective knowledge-based explanation (Suvin 1972; 1979).

Science fiction focuses on mechanical and scientific realism, whereas fantasy is more organic and otherworldly. Both, nevertheless, use history as well as elements of current socio-political environments to create imaginative frameworks as alternatives to our empirical environment, through which we try to understand our roots, express our emotions, and speculate about our futures. Futuristic science fiction and medieval fantasy thus do not differ in their nature, only in the content they use (following Holtorf 2010). Interestingly, a parallel to the similarities between Utopia and nostalgia can be seen here: both are similar in process, yet differ in temporal orientation.

The fantasy genre is defined and driven forward by media, which has become indivisible from contemporary culture (McLuhan 1964; Eco 1973; Bammer 1991; Sherry et al. 2001; Kozinets et al. 2004; Jansson 2002; Jameson 2005). Media allows fantasy to be better articulated and spread among people (Bammer 1991), but its intertwined nature with culture has caused fantasy and entertainment to collapse into one another with their critical difference possibly becoming impossible (Auslader 1992). Consumer research tends to focus on these popular notions (Martin 2004), often referring to fantasy as make-believe worlds articulated through mass media stories set outside of everyday reality (Kozinets 2001; Martin 2004).

Mackay (2001) proposes that contemporary fantasy exists within Imaginary-Entertainment Environments, which are fictional settings based on the combination and recombination of various media, such as novels, films, and television series, as well as fictive blocks found within these, which include brands, characters, plotlines, or even entire worlds. The result is something that people do not believe to be true, but, which nevertheless, makes sense and is familiar to them (Mackay 2001; Tolkien 1964; Illouz 2007). Elements of the various media are disconnected from and stripped of their original contexts, which creates environments that are individually specific, yet generic and sufficiently shared to be comprehensible among people (Mackay 2001; Hendricks 2006). Entities are broken down, dislocated, and unhinged with the whole being forgotten and only its parts living on in a rickety interconnection and reference to one another (Eco 1973). Each piece is recognisable, but the whole is reconfigured into something novel and unique (Fine 1983). The idea of Imaginary-Entertainment Environments is similar to Jenkins' (2006) convergence culture, which involves the flow of content across multiple media platforms, cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behaviour of media audiences. These ideas are visualised in Picture 3.

However, to view fantasy only from the point of view of media would be very limiting. Walton (1990) agrees that media, art, and various forms of fiction play a central role in interacting with fantasy. He points out that people often base fantasy on these or use them as props in some manner, as this helps structure unregulated and free imagination. However, fantasy does not need to be based on or "authorized", as Walton (1990) puts it, by such media. The process exceeds and can occur outside of the entertainment media. As Klinger (1971) puts it, describing fantasy as mere whimsy is an out-dated approach.

Picture 3 "Fantasy Worlds," acrylics on canvas, 68x106cm

2.8 Fantasy and Play

Fantasy is often described as playful and connected to the process of play (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982; Holt 1995; Belk 2000; Kozinets et al. 2004; Maclaran and Brown 2005; Molesworth 2006). Play, in turn, is seen as childish behaviour, which adults are expected to relinquish in favour of the superior, rational reality (Kinkade and Katovich 2008; Bowman 2010). Play tends to be seen as inappropriate, stereotyped, and stigmatised behaviour for adults (Irwin 1976; Bowman 2010). Much of the early research on play limits the practice only to children (e.g., Piaget 1962; Perner, Baker, and Hutton 1994), but it is as much a performance engaged in by adults (Schechner 2006; Bowman 2010). The difference is that adults tend to engage in more rule-bound and rationalised as well as spatially and temporally limited play (Schechner 2006).

Play has been defined and described in various ways, which, as Piaget (1962) notes, proves the difficulty of the concept. Johan Huizinga (1949) is probably the most famous scholar to study play. He described play to have the following characteristics: it is voluntary and free, it is outside ordinary or real life, it is temporally and spatially distinct from ordinary life, it is captivating and ordered, and it is outside of the concepts of good and bad. Moreover, Huizinga proposes that play is a natural activity that is not connected to material interest, and promotes the formation of social groups. Schechner (1993) describes play in a similar manner, adding that performance of play involves a special ordering of time and space, having specific rules, imbuing objects with special meaning, and being non-productive. It is important to note that play is different from games (Mead 1934).

A game is the tangible model for play, which is structured, contrived, and controlled (McLuhan 1964). Games organise play and allow it to be shared among individuals (Piaget 1962; Goffman 1974; McLuhan 1964).

Based on the above, it would appear that a traditional understanding of play bears many similarities to the concepts I have discussed in this chapter: play involves entering another world (Leach 2008), suspending disbelief (Gergen 1991), and indulging in something pleasurable and leisurely (Piaget 1962; Turner 1982). In the contemporary Western world, play is connected to unreality and inconsequentiality (Schechner 1993). It is seen as unserious, as it does not influence "real" matters (Goffman 1959, 1974; Carlson 2003). Moreover, it is perceived as less important and even as the opposite of work (Riezler 1941; Huizinga 1949; Caillois 2001; Slater 1997; Leach 2008). However, Schechner (1993) and Turner (1982) have shown that playful and serious performance are not that different from one another, and exist in a delicate balance. Turner (1982) argues that play is not the enemy of work, but is an important social practice that we partake in regularly. Play is central to "real life" (Huizinga 1949) as it allows individuals to learn (Groos 1896) and to practice life (Leach 2008) through loose, forgiving and permissive structures (Turner 1969; Schechner 2006). I discuss this in more detail in the next chapter.

What is important in play from the point of view of studying fantasy is that play interacts with something that is not reality (Riezler 1941; Schechner 1993; Caillois 2001). Play extends into imagination and involves the awareness of make-believe (Groos 1896; Huizinga 1949; Piaget 1962). Irwin (1976) has pointed out that play and fantasy are closely related, and thus understanding the former can aid in the exploration of the latter. Moreover, Klinger (1971) has proposed that the origins of play and fantasy are inseparable, the two becoming distinguished only in adulthood. As play is a natural activity (Huizinga 1949), this would imply that the underlying process is something essential to human life and interaction. It is important to note that fantasy exceeds play and games (Artaud 1974; Fine 1983; Dolan 2005; Jameson 2005), and although they make use of fantasy, they are not equal to it (McLuhan 1964). Play could thus be seen as a central form of performance, which serves as the basis for fantasy and imagination.

2.9 Fantasy and Agency

Because of the strong image of an escapist phenomenon rooted in media, fantasy is often seen as an irrational product of the mind (Jackson 1981; Hume 1984; Armitt 1996). However, fantasy also has an agentic aspect to it (Hoogland 2002; St. James, Handelman, and Taylor 2011). In this research, I approach agency from a performance point of view, defining it as the possibility for variation of repetitive structures and norms (following Butler 1990).

The etymology of the word "fantasy" lies in Greek, meaning "to make visible, to bring to light" (Oxford Dictionary). Fantasy is based on the fixed and definite, but at its root is a transgression that goes beyond the real on both a small-scale individual level and a large-scale societal level (Coleridge 1906; Todorov

1970; Bakhtin 1984; Armitt 1996). Through connecting to reality, fantasy seems to weave itself into people's self-identities and understanding of the world (Rook and Levy 1983; Hinerman 1992). Reality is not re-created, but discovered and interpreted (Traill 1996). Fantasy reconfigures and recombines familiar elements in ways that do not correspond with reality (Stanislavski 1989; Chekhov 1995; Jameson 2005), playing around with their possibilities, reflecting and projecting them into the present (Dolan 2005). Consequently, fantasy can allow us to survey time and space (Armitt 1996), understand our selves and our world (Todorov 1970; Hume 1984), and deal with the repressed and inexpressible through the telling and expelling of desire (Jackson 1981).

Fantasy aids self-transformation by allowing people to temporarily become someone else (Boruah 1988; Schouten 1991; Belk and Costa 1998) and test out different selves (Rose and Wood 2005). The individual is separated from reality within fantasy, allowing one to temporarily take on a different self (Belk and Costa 1998), giving room for evaluation and transformation (Boruah 1988). Through its connection to identity issues, fantasy has been presented by contemporary society as an almost solely personal phenomenon (Jameson 2005). As I have already noted, consumer research similarly tends to focus on studying fantasy as part of the inner worlds of individuals (Grayson and Martinec 2004; Martin 2004; Rose and Wood 2005; Fernandez and Lastovicka 2011).

Fantasy can never be truly private as it is constrained by the social context it is created in (Jackson 1981; Fine 1983). Moreover, research has shown that fantasy enables the creation of long- and short-term communities (Celsi, Rose, and Leigh 1993; Kozinets 2002a; Kinkade and Katovich 2008) through creating collective meanings (Goulding, Shankar, and Canniford 2011). The desires driving fantasy thus include both individual and personal concerns as well as those of collective, political, or even cosmic significance (Bakhtin 1984; Armitt 1996). Limiting fantasy to an individual phenomenon constrains its ability to set individuals to collectively strive towards a different future (Jameson 2005), reflect on the construction of society, and support the negotiation of meanings and norms (Tolkien 1964; Rook and Levy 1983; Peñaloza 2001; Hoogland 2002). Through helping consumers understand goals and gain ideals in the complex and paradoxical context of contemporary culture, fantasy holds within itself the possibility for agency (St. James, Handelman, and Taylor 2011). Fantasy can further provide hope and motivation (Rook and Levy 1983; Holbrook and Hirschman 1982; Mackay 2001; St. James, Handelman, and Taylor 2011), aiding people to cope with the demands and anxieties of everyday life within imaginary contexts (Rook and Levy 1983; Hinerman 1992; Deighton 1992; Kozinets 2001; Kozinets et al. 2004).

Consumer research has recognised these ideas, noting that fantasy can be intertwined with consumers' every-day problems, helping them to set and pursue goals, sustain hope, and enrich people's lives (Arnould and Price 1993; Kozinets et al. 2004; St. James, Handelman, and Taylor 2011). Fantasy has the potential to serve both individuals and society as a form of expression, critique, dissemination of knowledge, and innovation (Brecht 1965; Hoogland 2002), as it links that which does and does not exist, the known and the unknown (Grotowski 1968; Artaud 1974). While agency on both an individual and a societal level has been linked to

fantasy, it remains unclear how that agency is created and how it is linked to reality in everyday performance. I address this issue in the following chapters.

2.10 Fantasy, Art, and Aesthetics

Fantasy has been linked to aesthetics and various art forms, intersecting media, genre, and purpose (Tolkien 1964; Chekhov 1995; Traill 1996). McLuhan (1964) and Schechner (2006) have both noted that play and art use fantasy in similar ways, nevertheless leaving said process somewhat unclear.

The concept of aesthetics, just like the concept of fantasy, has no single grand narrative and ideas about it are very scattered (Cooper 1997). Charters (2006) points out that aesthetics necessitates a broad definition, as the experience involves symbolic, sensory, cognitive, and affective aspects. Aesthetics is normally understood as almost interchangeable with art, both aiming to be pleasing and beautiful (Dickie, Sclafani and Roblin 1989; Cooper 1997). However, aesthetics is not equal to art, and goes far beyond art and entertainment (Joy 2000; Venkatesh and Meamber 2006; Bode 2010). Art could be seen as the craft and physical form of aesthetics (Collingwood 1938; Dickie, Sclafani and Roblin 1989), while aesthetics is the experience of interaction with art (Venkatesh and Meamber 2006). Following Carroll (1998), Charters (2006), as well as Venkatesh and Meamber (2008), I do not differentiate high, low, and popular art or aesthetics, but rather focus on the experience itself.

The root of aesthetics is in the Greek *"aisthesthai",* which means perception (Oxford Dictionary). While originally referring to all sensory experience, the common understanding of aesthetics now refers to taste and beauty (Cooper 1997). In the contemporary Western world, aesthetics are seen as a higher order experience, which is differentiated from everyday life (Dickie, Sclafani and Roblin 1989; Venkatesh and Meamber 2006). The relationship between aesthetic and everyday experiences is complex and underexplored, as I will discuss in more detail in Chapter 4.

In the context of consumer research, Venkatesh and Meamber (2008) define aesthetics as "aspects of sensory experiences that are made manifest in the consumption of everyday objects that are presumed to have aesthetic qualities, as well as those experiences relating to art and art-like objects and artistic events" (p. 48). Aesthetic experiences are more than just the "cognitive, affective and behavioural responses to media, entertainment and the arts" (Holbrook 1980, p. 104), as they become embodied (Joy and Sherry 2003) and intrinsically linked to the everyday practices of individuals (Venkatesh and Meamber 2006, 2008). However, aesthetics has generally been studied in consumer research through the forms that it takes in art and entertainment (Venkatesh and Meamber 2008).

Aesthetics is often thought of as something the artist creates and the viewer simply observes or receives. Tolstoi (2003), for instance, believed that the aim of art is to crystallise the artist's emotions and induce these feelings in others. However, Collingwood (1938) proposes that artistic activity is about becoming aware and conscious of one's emotions and their expression, both as an artist and a

viewer. Moreover, he stresses that while aesthetics is often presented as purely mental and resulting in a physical form of art, it does not require a recognisable or physical form (Collingwood 1938).

One perspective on aesthetics contends that it is a representation or imitation of human action, which can be recognised and understood by individuals, allowing them to engage with it and thus gain truth (Cooper 1997). Hegel (1975) talked about aesthetics being the manifestation of ultimate reality, which underlies our experience. Schopenhauer (1969), while stressing that reality is distinct from its subjective presentation and experience, saw aesthetics as representation of our subjective experiences of the world, conveying truth and essence.

Stepping away from the idea of aesthetics as finding and showing truth, Plotinus maintained that artists do not simply imitate what they see, but go beyond that in providing a sensory experience (Cooper 1997). Dewey (1980) elaborated that aesthetics create unique experiences, but these experiences are shared, symbolically mediated social activities. He continues that everyday life involves the continuous disruption of structures and their recovery, aesthetics being an especially pure form of the latter. Life and art thus reflect, support and blend into one another (Dewey 1980; Lyotard 1994).

Kant (1952) proposed that one can engage in two types of aesthetic experiences: beauty and the sublime. Both are subjective judgments that refer to objects and are connected to presentation and sensation. The two concepts have become central to aesthetics as well as theory beyond it, and have thus been widely discussed. As I already noted, beauty and the sublime form the basis of Coleridge's understanding of fantasy and imagination (Jameson 2005). I further link these concepts to the experience of fantasy in the next section.

Beauty is found in the form of things, which makes it very understandable, but also very limited. It is external and well suited for representation, as it has defined and definite boundaries, it tends to become physically manifest, and it is based on and adapts to schemas we already understand. It is ordered and logical, it has clear purpose, and it imposes finality and rest. Beauty thus provides direct pleasure, which is positive, joyful, harmonious, and playful (Kant 1952; Lyotard 1994). The sublime, on the other hand, is infinite, overwhelming, and cannot be contained in form. It is an internal process of being in awe. Because it is without form or boundaries, it represents something at the very edge of what is presentable to the mind; an indeterminate concept of reason (Kant 1952; Lyotard 1994). The sublime results in pleasure that is serious, indirect, and almost negative and anguishing. This pleasure is based on the limitlessness of the experience, that is, the awareness that there is something overwhelming that transcends us, which we can almost glimpse. The experience cannot become physically manifest and is poorly adapted to perception or presentation, as it goes beyond established concepts (Kant 1952; Lyotard 1994). Overall, beauty can be said to be the result of imagination and understanding, while the sublime occurs between something conceivable and presentable (Lyotard 1994). The two are often posited as opposites (e.g. Zizek 1989), yet, as Lyotard (1994) points out, they flow into and interact with one another.

Strong parallels can be drawn between fantasy and aesthetics. Both consist of processes of reflecting on and mirroring everyday life (Turner 1987; Schechner 1988; Butler 1990), and are connected to media, entertainment, and art (Holbrook 1980). Tolkien (1964) points out that both fantasy and aesthetics serve as operative links to imagination, expressing that which is not or is not yet existing in what we experience as reality. The activities further exist outside of what we conceive of as reality, creating a world of inner consistency (Tolkien 1964). Aesthetics and fantasy both exceed established knowledge and allow us to see the impossible (following Hegel 1975; Lyotard 1994), responding to and extending imagination (Collingwood 1938; Kant 1952; Lyotard 1994). However, while aesthetics can be formless, fantasy needs to have a form to strive for and focus attention on in order to sustain itself and be understood by people (following Hume 1984; Chekhov 1995). Fantasy may overspill beyond its form and is thus not reduced to it (Armitt 1996), yet is tied to and limited by the particular body it inhabits (Hume 1984). Moreover, whereas aesthetics calls on elements familiar to us (Kant 1952; Lyotard 1994), fantasy works *with* and *from* prior knowledge (Jackson 1981; Hume 1984; Jameson 2005).

Following these ideas, I would propose that fantasy and aesthetics are very similar processes of experience and expression, yet the former always embraces a link to form and reality, while the latter tends to avoid it. Art is something that may be used as a prop or embodiment of either process. However, it remains unclear what this process entails, as well as how it is felt and experienced by individuals. I believe the answer lies in exploring the concept of fantasy. I further discuss aesthetics and its link to fantasy in the next chapter.

2.11 Forms of Fantasy

It becomes evident that fantasy is not just an unproductive creation of the mind, but a different way of approaching and relating to reality (following Zizek 1992; Firat 2001; Firat and Ulusoy 2007); an activity that appeals to all of our senses, emotions and cognition (Artaud 1971; Jackson 1981; Hume 1984; Armitt 1996; Traill 1996). Following these ideas, I explore fantasy from an inclusive perspective.

A few studies have taken a similar, encompassing point of view on fantasy, presenting it as a general genre (Todorov 1970; Armitt 1996), an aesthetic category (Traill 1996), and a mode of being (Jackson 1981). However, such conceptualisations are very narrow, says Traill (1996), and confuse fantasy with its form and content. I believe the most suitable description for a more bodily and negotiated perspective on fantasy is provided by Kathryn Hume (1984). Hume (1984) argues that fantasy should be seen as an inclusive and flexible phenomenon, the different manifestations of which overlap and interact. Hume (1984) defines fantasy as a human *activity* of constructing that, which departs the consensus of reality. To gain an inclusive understanding of fantasy, Hume (1984) closely studied various definitions of fantasy from a theoretical point of view. She proposes that the diverse and even contradicting definitions of fantasy can be connected to construct four basic forms of fantasy (Hume 1984). These are *illusion*, *vision*, *revision*, and *disillusion*. In

the next sections, I describe these forms of fantasy in more detail, exploring their connections to various other conceptualisations of fantasy and linking them to consumer culture research.

Hume's (1984) forms of fantasy bear some similarity to other theoretical work. The forms are alike to Armitt's (1996) ideas of fantasy being pulled in two opposite directions, one being escapist entertainment and the other rationalised psychoanalytic fantasy. In parallel, Suvin (1979) mentions that fantasy can be escapist or cognitive. Tolkien (1964) correspondingly writes that interaction with fantasy worlds can lead to escape, consolation (re-enchantment of one's perspectives on reality), or recovery (estrangement from and transformation of habitual perceptions of reality). Unlike Hume, these authors do not go into detail about how these forms of fantasy come to be or how they differ.

Hume's ideas of fantasy further correlate with Todorov's (1970) and Jackson's (1981) conceptualisations of fantasy as a continuum ranging between "the marvelous" and "the uncanny". The marvelous can be described as supernatural, magical, and unconnected to reality, but, nevertheless, accepted and believed in by its viewers. The uncanny, on the other hand, is alienation from reality that is dependent on explicable natural elements, distorting and disorienting individuals. The fantastic, used here interchangeably with fantasy, can be found between the marvelous and the uncanny, borrowing and juggling elements of both (Todorov 1970; Jackson 1981; Traill 1996).

2.11.1 Illusion Fantasy

Fantasy in the form of *illusion* retreats from and escapes society, indulging people in amusing and pleasing themes. The aim of the *illusion* form is to comfort, resulting in complete disengagement from everyday life (Hume 1984). Such fantasy allows individuals to deal with stress, reduce anxiety, and sustain hope (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982; Kozinets et al. 2004; St. James, Handelman, and Taylor 2011; Waskul 2006). While giving people temporary relief, *illusion* lacks meaning and points to unfulfilled values, unable to challenge us or help us interpret our world (Hume 1984). Fantasy in such form becomes far more gratifying than the truth of everyday life (Jameson 2005), causing people to become addicted to it (Campbell 1987).

Fantasy that Hume describes as *illusion* has no educational or interrogative value, and merely guides an individual's gaze away from real problems (Brecht 1965; Williams 1991). It creates an illusionary world for individuals to escape into, encouraging only passive acceptance with no critical awareness (Hume 1984). Fantasy may seem to have more possibility, as it is not restricted by reality, but, by creating a perfect, ideal version of life for pleasure, possibility becomes lost.

Such fantasy dominates contemporary society, as it does not transgress social order or encourage active reaction (Jackson 1981; Leach 2004). This mediatised and popular form of fantasy reconfirms institutional order by supplying a vicarious fulfilment of desire, encouraging escapism, and neutralising an urge towards disobedience (Cohen and Taylor 1976; Jackson 1981). Trapped in an endlessly

free-playing alternative world, fantasy becomes self-referential and can create nothing more than what is already found within its parameters and conventions (Armitt 1996).

The worlds created by this type of fantasy are unquestioned and perceived as consistent, logical, as well as making sense because of their shared frame of reference of entertainment media (Tolkien 1964; Fine 1983; Suvin 1988; Mackay 2001). Fantasy ends up following quite stereotypical patterns and goals (Jenkins, Nixon and Molesworth 2011), inducing its own norms, structures, and status games on individuals (Mackay 2001; Schechner 2006). Individuals experience this fantasy as very real and authentic because it encourages immersion and provides instantly recognisable themes (Fine 1983; Mackay 2001). It nevertheless remains a mere enrichment and a means of short-term pain alleviation, because of its lack of ability to overcome the physical and social constructs of reality (Mackay 2001; Kozinets 2001). Consequently, such fantasy is often regarded by people as a place of non-productive play that has no regard for everyday life (Mackay 2001; Schechner 2006). This keeps fantasy's connection to aspects of reality at bay, and obstructs its ability to extend human awareness (Jameson 2005). Moreover, people seem to be unable to see past this form, causing it to be equated with how people understand fantasy in general (Brecht 1965; Armitt 1996).

The *illusion* form of fantasy is similar to the idea of the marvelous, which evokes no reaction and is simply taken as an otherworldly phenomenon with no connection to everyday life (Todorov 1970). The marvelous is idealised, escapist, and consists of elements that are not perceived as natural, real, or rationally explainable by the individual. It is based purely on the individuals' belief for it, aiming to make up for things one lacks in everyday life (Jackson 1981). This possibly drives individuals towards the ideals of the Utopian impulse that are prevalent in the contemporary consumer society (cf. Kozinets and Handelman 2004).

Illusion is perhaps the most prevalent form of fantasy to be found in consumer culture research because of its strong link to entertainment and media. Takhar, Maclaran, and Stevens (2012) have shown the fantasy of Bollywood movies to reaffirm pride in Indian heritage, evoke longing, and reinforce family values and a sense of kinship. In the context of Powerscourt Townhouse Center festival marketplace, Maclaran and Brown (2005) describe consumers as engaging in activities of play in a space felt to be elsewhere. Consumer culture research tends to see fantasy as something one can step into in order to take a break from or even escape the real world (Belk and Costa 1998; Kozinets et al. 2004; Jenkins, Nixon, and Molesworth 2011). This form of fantasy has been shown through various arenas: playing video games (Molesworth 2006), Star Trek fan activities (Kozinets 2001), in the entertainment world of the ESPN zone (Sherry et al. 2001; Kozinets et al. 2004), in the farcical consumption of Las Vegas (Belk 2000), as well as through engaging in the fantastic imaginary of the trading card game *"Magic: The Gathering"* (Martin 2004). Such consumption is strongly connected to the idea of otherworldliness, play, and enjoyment, because it creates an ethereal culture in a different space and time (Belk and Costa 1998; Kozinets 2002a; Rose and Wood 2005). It allows individuals to relax and forget about their problems and worries,

as it involves a separate world of refuge and freedom (Belk and Costa 1998; Kozinets et al. 2004; Kinkade and Katovich 2008).

2.11.2 Vision Fantasy

Fantasy as *vision* also aims to comfort, but simultaneously to engage people by helping them understand their lives and their reality (Hume 1984). This form is based on the comparison of the world we perceive as real and the worlds created by *illusion* fantasy. *Vision* introduces and contrasts multiple truths, which stimulates people's awareness and engages them in interpretation. This results in a new and refreshed sense of reality, as well as the recognition of detail that is normally missed (Jackson 1981; Hume 1984). The individual's reaction, however, is limited to conscious recognition, as the primary realm of *vision* remains the world of ideals. Individuals envisage new possibilities, but never put them to action (Hume 1984; Hoogland 2002).

The *vision* form highlights fantasy's dependency on culture by presenting a comparison of what is and is not possible in a given temporal and spatial context (Hume 1984). It does not just reaffirm order, but also challenges it by comparing, contrasting, and confronting its limits (Todorov 1970; Armitt 1996). Fantasy enters a dialogue with the real, continuously interrogating and questioning it (Jackson 1981). This becomes a collective concern, as it shapes experiences, re-imagines knowledge, and connects new ideas, values, and meanings (Chronis, Arnould, and Hampton 2013). In addition to the collective process, fantasy helps deal with individual issues by allowing people to observe themselves and their desires from new perspectives (Walton 1978; Hume 1984; Campbell 1987; Martin 2004). However, redefining the real can create overwhelming power, a violation that can be extremely frightening to individuals. Such fantasy thus easily reverts to more illusionary forms of fantasy, retaining its oppressing limitations (Armitt 1996).

On Todorov's (1970) continuum from marvelous to uncanny, the *vision* form of fantasy corresponds to the fantastic-marvelous. Following its name, it is strongly connected to the marvelous, but moves towards the uncanny on the continuum. In the fantastic-marvelous, people face the unexplained and always accept it. The experience can stir up thoughts and emotions, but never strongly influences individuals' lives or brings them to action (Todorov 1970; Jackson 1981).

Fantasy in the form of *vision* has emerged in consumer culture research as individuals taking a small step away from and reflecting on the escapist themes of *illusion*. This does not involve taking action, but rather contemplating or realising new details. In the context of re-enacting fur-trade rendezvous, Belk and Costa (1998) describe consumers as not only experiencing fun and enjoyment, but also possibility, development, and challenges. Fernandez and Lastovicka (2011) show that amateur guitar players gain empowerment in their real lives through the momentary escape of rock performance fantasies. Similarly, the fantasy aspects of reality TV allow people to play around with possibilities of their own lives (Rose and Wood 2005), and American Civil War re-enactment helps explore and re-

imagine history (Chronis, Arnould, and Hampton 2013). Lastly, to give a very vivid example of *vision* fantasy, Radway (1991) demonstrated how romance reading can become a form of identification and escape from life for women. She continues that such escape is not individualised, but happens through involvement in a community, thus creating a momentary frame of incorporation and resistance, in which women were able to temporarily combat dominant relationships and refuse social roles. An illusion of opposition was provided, but at the same time overridden, reinforcing dominant values and showing people their place in the world (Radway 1991).

2.11.3 Revision Fantasy

Fantasy in the form of *revision* is in many ways similar to the form of *vision*, with the key difference being *revision's* ability to push individuals into action, making fantasy more embodied. While *vision* remains more closely linked to imagination, *revision* focuses on the context of reality, which it questions by either idealising of demonising it (Hume 1984). In addition to questioning social order, fantasy itself becomes questioned (Hume 1984; Armitt 1996). *Vision's* familiar and comforting forms are exchanged for defamiliarised states, where the static and finite are destabilised (Armitt 1996). The aim of the fantasy form shifts to disturbing individuals in order to get them to become engaged (Hume 1984).

Successful fantasy in the form of *revision* makes us yearn for the violation of reality (Hume 1984). *Revision* fantasy thus causes individuals to reconsider their living practices and uncover ideas concerning their unconscious, threatening fixity, and conformity to social order even more than *vision* (Hume 1984; Armitt 1996). Fantasy becomes hostile to static and fixed units, dissolving systems by interrogating them (Bakhtin 1984), and allowing us to travel across limits that are otherwise impossible to transgress (Armitt 1996). While seemingly becoming more aggressive and unpleasant than the previously presented forms of fantasy, *revision* can still be pleasurable, as long as its premise is accepted by individuals. Nevertheless, unlike *illusion* and *vision*, *revision* can hold an individual's interest and attention even if the premise is not entertaining (Hume 1984).

The *revision* form of fantasy helps people to better understand their context in which they live and reveal new aspects of it. Moreover, it can support individuals' exploration and understanding of their identities and ideals. Most importantly, the *revision* form does not simply force people to contemplate ideas, but also motivates them to action through presenting the possibility for agency to pursue goals and actively reclaim meaning (following Schouten 1991; Kozinets 2001; Kozinets et al. 2004; Fernandez and Lastovicka 2011; St. James, Handelman, and Taylor 2011). Unfortunately, the form is often too simplified and rarely lives up to its full potential (Hume 1984).

Once again making a connection to Todorov's (1970) marvelous-uncanny continuum, the *revision* form most closely resembles the concept of fantastic-uncanny. As its name suggests, fantastic-uncanny takes a step away from fantastic-marvelous and is much closer to the uncanny on the continuum. Because of its

close link to the uncanny, the fantastic-uncanny is perceived by individuals to be a context that can be explained rationally. The mode encourages individuals to probe fantasy, and thus focuses on creating a break in and a transgression of the strict structures of society (Todorov 1970; Jackson 1981).

In consumer culture research, *revision* emerges as agency created through fantasy. Blanchette (2014) describes members of the neo-burlesque community creating more enjoyable experiences for themselves by renegotiating history and the past with the help of fantasy elements. In a similar manner, Rook and Levy (1983) show how grooming fantasies help consumers to cope with social norms. Schouten (1991) proposes, in the context of plastic surgery, that fantasy selves play an important part in the mental elaboration of consumers' ideals, setting the direction for what is possible. Lastly, exploring the context of weight loss, St. James, Handelman, and Taylor (2011) show how individuals gain control over their bodies by drawing on fantasy. Individuals become capable of influencing the outcomes and consequences of their actions, as negotiating elements of reality and fantasy helps them to face the contradictory and paradoxical cultural forces that limit them.

2.11.4 Disillusion Fantasy

Fantasy in the form of *disillusion* completely rejects *illusion* and liberates individuals from it by exaggerating, skewing, and/or destroying it. The form makes a plea to our emotions with an aim to disturb us. The effect is a disengagement that does not try to present a different world in the way *illusion* or *vision* would, but rather questions and changes our own reality. *Disillusion* calls to attention the limitations of our reality, our culture, our senses, and the communication skills used to convey these to our perception by defamilirising space and time (Hume 1984). This causes us to reassess our subjectivity and challenge perceived notions of contemporary reality (Armitt 1996). The most important difference between *disillusion* and *revision* is that *disillusion* moves beyond actuality by uncovering the fact that norms are questionable and changeable notions governed by the structures of reality. Hence, *disillusion* ends up establishing, embodying, and constructing new possibilities from outside of our perception of reality (Hume 1984).

Fantasy in the form of *disillusion* causes us to look at familiar things as new and possibly even dangerous elements, reminding us that change is possible (Armitt 1996). As fantasy alienates its viewers and presents radical alternative, it creates what Brecht called the Verfremdungseffekt, more simply put as the V-effect (Jameson 2005) or the alienation effect (Meyerhold 1968). This process involves making something very ordinary special or strange by taking it out of its context and placing it at the front of conscious perception. The alienation effect shocks, teaches, and shows people their capability for agency. It presents new models of society that are possibly more viable, vigorous, and gratifying than those in power, asking people to absorb the alternative. Nothing is self-evident, which causes people to continuously analyse and question. This creates a context of a

different intensity from that of a natural experience or genuine contemplation of reality (Brecht 1965, 2000). Alienation does not represent anything, but creates an embodied experience with individuals as active participants (Eisenstein 2002).

The alienation effect is very similar to the idea of the grotesque. The grotesque involves the transformation, exaggeration, and combination of opposites, with its central premise being the body and its material existence (Bakhtin 1984). Taking fantasy to the bodily level creates intensely detailed naturalistic imagery and places the individual in a situation outside their familiar context, allowing for the hidden and the unconscious to emerge. The grotesque exists as juxtaposition to its cultural context and is thus always alien and hostile. However, it also suggests the potential of another world, another order, and another way of life (Bakhtin 1984), returning us to the idea of Utopia and the Utopian.

Disillusion is similar to Todorov's (1970) conceptualisation of the uncanny, which is a mode of fantasy that can be explained by readily available natural reasons, but is experienced as extraordinary, unexpected, and shocking (Todorov 1970; Jackson 1981). It does not accept either fantasy or reality, and, seeing them as part of an oppressive order, aims to erode, scrutinise, and transform both. The process involves subversion, estrangement, and dismantling of the real by creating a reflection of our own world that suggests instability (Jackson 1981). The uncanny does not present anything new, but involves the dread and horror of the hidden and unfamiliar that exist in relation to the familiar (Todorov 1970; Jackson 1981). This defamiliarisation provides clues to the limits of our culture and our selves, disturbing individuals and causing them to search and aspire to a transformation (Jackson 1981).

Disillusion is quite an extreme form of fantasy and rarely explored in consumer culture research. A vivid example of *disillusion* is Judith Butler's (1990) study of drag. The practice of imitating another gender reveals the imitative and contingent structure it is a part of, denaturalising the structure through performance. In a similar way, Goulding and Saren (2009) have shown members of goth communities to reconstruct gender and identity norms by challenging and rethinking them.

2.12 Summary

Through the review of literature, it becomes evident that fantasy is a complex phenomenon that has been studied in various disciplines. In this research, I take on an inclusive, bodily, and negotiated perspective on fantasy as a human activity of performing that departs from the consensus of reality (following Hume 1984). Moreover, I approach fantasy as secondary elaboration of imagination, which becomes understandable to us through its basis in and connection to elements we understand as real. Fantasy requires belief, and can reach for Utopia and/or nostalgia, helping create and drive desires. Play can be seen as a central form of the performance of fantasy. The process of fantasy bears many similarities to aesthetics, with the former embracing form and reality, and the latter avoiding it. Nevertheless, fantasy is different from dreaming, as it is under the conscious control of individuals. Fantasy is often understood through its opposition to

reality, but the two have become equals in terms of their experience. Reality and fantasy are intrinsically tied to one another but remain differentiated on a subjective level, making fantasy a different type of attitude to reality.

While previous studies help define fantasy, they have mostly looked at the process from a theoretical point of view. Moreover, they do not elaborate on many of the suggested processes. Before turning to the theoretical framework I used to study experiences of fantasy, I present an overview of the historical development of the concept to help situate it in contemporary Western culture.

3 HISTORY OF FANTASY

Fantasy is often understood as a post-enlightenment concept, but the activity also existed in a world before industrialisation, rationalisation of thought, or the division of labour and social roles (Hume 1984). Imagination and fantasy have always been a part of the human world (Appadurai 1998; Saler 2012). The divide perceived between the real and the imaginary, however, is an extremely recent occurrence (Campbell 1987), which continues to be re-interpreted in our culture (Zipes 1983; Traill 1996).

Fantasy's perception, position, and function in society have changed significantly over the years from something that is an inherent and natural part of our reality to something foreign and in opposition to what we see as real life (Tolkien 1964; Fine 1983). The change in people's perception is closely linked to the development of humanity in general (Campbell 1987), as fantasy is embedded in and closely intertwined with a larger nexus of beliefs and norms of a specific time and place (Fine 1986; Mackay 2001; Ryan 2001; Lin 2012). Consumer culture research has noted that fantasy is linked to reality (e.g., Martin 2004; Molesworth 2006), but studies have not explored the background or the significance of this relationship. In order to locate fantasy and better understand its role in the contemporary Western social context, it is important to explore its development.

In this chapter, I provide a brief overview of the development of the phenomenon of fantasy in the recent history of Western culture as it is subjectively perceived by individuals in order to situate fantasy in the social and cultural context of my study. First, I discuss the role of fantasy in "traditional" preindustrial societies, where fantasy was a shared communal practice, undifferentiated from reality and seen to be a part of life. Next, I explore the development of fantasy in the context of the world that became industrialised and globalised. Here, fantasy became individualised and attached to aesthetic forms. I further show that through the spread of reason and rationality, fantasy developed into something that is secondary to reality: irrational and purely entertaining, and hidden away in individuals' minds. Later on, fantasy was combined with rational structures of reality and became commodified. Lastly, I discuss fantasy from the perspective of the fragmented context of contemporary culture, where concepts of fantasy and reality have supposedly become blurred.

By observing the manifestations of fantasy throughout recent Western history, it becomes apparent that the widespread form and focus of fantasy correlates with the ideas of reality, self, and meaning that govern the particular temporal and spatial context. Moreover, fantasy is intrinsically tied to the development of the

marketplace. The central manifestation of fantasy shifts throughout the development of history, moving from ritual to art to consumption to entertainment and media. I discuss these ideas in more detail below.

3.1 Fantasy as Part of Preindustrial Reality

In the traditional pre-modern and preindustrial society, fantasy and reality were uncontested, undifferentiated, and coexisting facts (Traill 1996; Goffman 1959). Fantasy was a part of culture and the "true" world, and thus its perception and experiencing was not different from that of everyday life (Lin 2012). It is important to note that such fantasy is drastically different from contemporary fantasy, which involves cohesive structuring and clear, explicit marking as non-real (Saler 2012).

In a world that was not yet globalised, culture and morals were naturally very contextual (Turner 1982; Slater 1997). At the same time, life was linked to eternal verities, binding and unifying the specific community to which they belonged. All social performance was collective and stored within behaviours and customs as part of natural, cyclical structures (Turner 1982; Schechner 1985; Campbell 1987; McKenzie 2001; Lin 2012). The social process was regarded to be a single entity of visible and invisible components (Turner 1982), and reality was thus experienced as both material and spiritual, creating fluidity in representation and perception (Lin 2012). No distinction was made between reality and imagination, resulting in events that combined multiple functions and expressions into complex multivocal affairs (Turner 1982; Schechner 1988; Lewis 2008).

In traditional societies, there was little scope for individuality or independent agency, and individuals emerged completely determined by their context (Mead 1934). People lived out their lives under the influence of forces of nature, both physical and mystical, enforced by shared values and behaviour (Tolkien 1964; Campbell 1987). As a result of these influences, strong social constraints emerged, epitomised in loyalty to tradition, kinship, and hierarchy. The only way to momentarily step out of this rigid status system, as well as enable individual and societal change was through making contact with "other" worlds of spirits and gods (Turner 1982). Such activities enriched people's lives, serving humanity as a way of becoming aware of truth and creating a common understanding (Brecht 1965; Grotowski 1968: Chekhov 1995).

The "other" place was reached by means of religious and magical rituals, which were based on the interaction of the subjunctive and indicative moods of sociocultural action (Turner 1982). The subjunctive mood is "always concerned with 'wish, desire, possibility, or hypothesis'; it is a world of 'as if,' ranging from scientific hypothesis to festive fantasy" (Turner 1982, p. 83). It makes present that which is absent and imaginary, creating a storehouse of possibilities through combining elements found in nature and culture (Turner 1982; Schechner 2006). The subjunctive exists in contrast to the indicative mood of action, which corresponds to quotidian life. The indicative is a world of "as is", where actuality and factuality reign (Turner 1982, 1990). Turner (1990) proposed that every socioeco-

nomic formation has a cultural-aesthetic form of self-reflection, a "mirror", which helps resolve conflicts and deal with everyday life by balancing the subjunctive and indicative. In pre-modern societies, rituals had this role of the "mirror" by providing the stage for unique structures of experience and detachment from mundane life. Structure and the mirrored anti-structure created a continuous social process, where neither was able to sustain society without the other (Turner 1969, 1982, 1985, 1990).

The ritual process was highly structured and obligatory to all members of society (Turner 1969; Agnew 1986). It created a carnival in a particular time and space, a topsy-turvy alternate world, which acted as an enactment on the boundary of society (Bakhtin 1984). The carnival was a birthplace for play, creativity, and innovation (Turner 1969; Carlson 2003), which positioned people in relation to one another, creating an inclusive sense of community and belonging (Turner 1969; Schechner 1988; Dolan 2005; Lin 2012). Rituals were very theatrical, but they were based on patterns of doing rather than scripts (Schechner 1988). Moreover, there was no divide between performers and spectators, which supported the communal nature of society (Agnew 1986). The whole process was a natural part of life and the roles played were no different from the social roles of everyday life (Turner 1982). All participants reacted to theatrical events actively, and were pulled into the "other" world as if the theatre signifiers were real (Lin 2012).

Rituals created a space and time where the principles of the surrounding society could be confronted, probed, and questioned (Bakhtin 1984; Agnew 1986). However, the order of society was never subverted, but rather reaffirmed, as the goal was to teach meaning and the effects of action by inscribing knowledge though performance (Turner 1982; Carlson 2003). Learning was established by suggesting chaotic disorder as an alternative to the established order, and, thus, creating general social affirmation through showing the destructive nature of such chaos (Bakhtin 1984; Agnew 1986; Carlson 2003). Besides reaffirming and teaching social order, the ritual process also enabled the transformation of actualities into new ones by making happen what it celebrated (Schechner 1988). The ritual process was very functional, as it generated myths and symbols, which brought meaning to people and became templates for the maintenance, reaffirmation, and sometimes even the reclassification of society (Turner 1982).

According to Agnew (1986), the community's social exchange at this time existed within the assigned space and time of the peripheral processes of the ritual, and thus tied into fantasy performance. Originally consisting of gifting and tributary practices, social exchange grew into commodity exchange through interaction among communities. This resulted in the creation of a market, which was not yet an autonomous economy, but a neutral space protected by the closed space of the ritual and defined by a continuous movement of people and commodities (Agnew 1986). With time, society and culture assigned the market a place at the margins of everyday life. This place remained intrinsically linked to religion and always stayed near places of worship, as commodity exchange was connected to seasonal ceremonies, rites, and power. The risks of the market were confined to its designated places and occasions, and a watchful eye could be kept on the market's subjunctive nature and capability of transgression of boundaries. Nevertheless, distanced

from the many worlds it was mixed with, the marketplace proceeded to develop its own rules, and slowly advanced from being a space to being a matter of sensibility (Agnew 1986).

All in all, fantasy was of a collective nature and largely consisted of images, experiences, and emotions that were prescribed to people through religion and myths (Schechner 1988; Campbell 1987). Fantasy was normative and instructive, as it sustained norms, affirmed values, and supported social functions (Zipes 1983; Hume 1984; Agnew 1986). Moreover, fantasy allowed reflection, presentation of alternative arrangements, as well as the possibility to conserve or transform reality (McKenzie 2001).

3.2 Aesthetic Fantasy

A critical change in the history of humanity took place with industrialisation, which brought about the growth of the population, the development of commerce, and the division of labour (Gergen 1991; Slater 1997). The large-scale, complex, modern communities were unable to sustain general social affirmation, and, as a result, the conventional structures of rituals could no longer be honoured (Turner 1982, 1987; Carlson 2003). The religious symbols that guided people's lives and prescribed imagination started to become very abstract and general in character. Doubts and questioning of religious and spiritual beliefs began to occur, resulting in the symbols for associated emotions being removed (Hume 1984; Campbell 1987; Gergen 1991). This is similar to what Weber (2004) described as disenchantment, that is, the devaluation of mysticism and magical orientations through rationalisation, which resulted in the loss of meaning, wonder, and purpose.

Emotions were removed from their religious or communal associations, but they did not cease to occur (Campbell 1987; Scott 1994). The experience of fantasy retained a link to otherworldliness and transcendental abilities (Agnew 1986), yet because of the lack of connection to religion, the otherworldliness could no longer be believable or survive as a part of "realistic" life (Atwood 2011). To compensate for the detachment from its guides in the world, fantasy evolved from something prescribed to a community into a self-determined ability to conjure up and control realistic images (Campbell 1987). Without belief in higher powers, fantasy became an expression of human forces and an exploration of the human condition (Jackson 1981). Individuals became capable of choosing for themselves what emotion to undergo and gain pleasure from (Campbell 1987).

This development of fantasy was strongly connected to the rise of self-consciousness, a unique modern ability to become aware of the world's object-ness and the self's subject-ness (Agnew 1986; Campbell 1987). The body and mind were separated, and ideas of inner and outer realms became possible (Stanislavski 1953). Moreover, culture and community no longer provided values for individuals, thus, forcing people to focus on themselves (Hetherington 1998). The connection between people and the world was severed, leaving behind only the individualist search for this lost link (McLuhan 1962; Agnew 1986; Campbell

1987). The concept of the individual self emerged as separate and detached from society, yet central to human interaction (Mead 1934; Slater 1997).

The search for the lost link became imperative, but it could no longer be found in religious or spiritual practices, which were losing their power as they became disconnected from quotidian life (Campbell 1987). The link could not be found in reality either, as it became rational, pragmatic, and limited (Hume 1984). Similarly, the market completely gravitated from its ceremonial and religious origins. The market transformed from a place to an abstract process that is placeless, timeless, and boundless. This process permeated culture, inverting the relationship of culture and marketplace, with the latter now containing the former (Agnew 1986).

In a further attempt to find the lost link, the search resorted to experiences of aesthetic nature (Campbell 1987), with art being elevated to the medium for communicating with the invisible world (Cooper 1997). Aesthetics became the vehicle for fantasy (Campbell 1987), with the latter gaining its own space, in which it was plausible and acceptable for individuals to interact with it (Atwood 2011).

The purpose of aesthetic experiences was not to amuse, but to show people the truth in the form of worldviews, conventions, and behaviours (Campbell 1987). This was done through transforming reality into something illusory and ideal in order to step out from under a repressive order (Agnew 1986; Campbell 1987). The ideal world was separated from reality as well as the cosmic and mythic concerns of the ritual, but continued to present strong opinions on the political and social order as well as moral aspects of life (Bammer 1991; Agnew 1986; Campbell 1987). As a result, the new creative power of fantasy allowed us to discover a depth in ourselves previously unknown (Bakhtin 1984). Such romantic fantasy was metaphysical, aimed at sincerity and authenticity, and had a hope for restoring enchantment (Saler 2012), that is, the lost link. Fantasy became a threat to religion, as it presented its own morals and a different order (Hume 1984).

Aesthetic fantasy took form in different arts, the most widespread and popularised one of which was theatre. Previously tied to ritual structures, theatre continued to invert and subvert social structure as a communal and public practice (Agnew 1986). Such interaction involved what Abercombie and Longhurst (1998) called a *simple audience*, the experience of which is localised, shared, and involves the direct communication of an immediate aesthetic with a high level of attention from the participants. Such interaction is always public and includes a clear distinction between a performer and spectator (or producer and consumer) (Abercombie and Longhurst 1998), something that was previously unheard of in fantasy. Fantasy thus became immensely structured and started to alienate itself from reality.

3.3 Private Irrational Fantasy

The widespread aesthetisation of fantasy was made possible through the development of typography and the printing press (McLuhan 1962; Gergen 1991), which resulted in the shift from a public experience of fantasy on stage to a private

experience of fantasy through the novel (Agnew 1986). As the public performance became increasingly privatised in its nature (Abercombie and Longhurst 1998), fantasy adopted the written form, becoming even more concrete and separate from people's understanding of reality (Atwood 2011). In fact, Saler (2012) stresses that literary fiction played a central part in the creation of fantasy as we know and experience it today. This privatised fantasy replaced any remnants of sacred pre-modern fantasy and became explicitly marked and established as unreal (Saler 2012). People embraced this artificial opposition of real and unreal (Radway 1991), which was largely based on mass media (Saler 2012).

The themes of the new medium inhabited by fantasy revolved mostly around ideas of romantic love, resulting in the re-conceptualising, popularising, and idealising of how we experience emotions (Campbell 1987). Romance reading retained the ritual function of reinforcing values and showing individuals their place in the world (Radway 1991), but also created an experience of individual self-discovery, which became the means of reaching universal truth (Leach 2004). The power of creating meaning and sensations was transferred from the world to the individual (Agnew 1986; Campbell 1987; Scott 1994). The unknown space of fantasy became filled with ourselves (Atwood 2011), and individuals were put in charge of their own fate (Brecht 1965).

With industrialisation, globalisation, and individualisation, the world became an objective whole, in which truth could be found without spiritual help (Leach 2004). The attributes of reality discarded any spiritual ideas and focused on materiality (Agnew 1986; Slater 1997). Science became popularised and respected, resulting in the modern world's fixation with rationality (McLuhan 1964; Traill 1996). Reason became a guarantee for meaning, which could help predict and calculate elements of life (Østergaard, Fitchett, and Jantzen 2013). Rationalism, in turn, created realism (Jameson 2005), that is, the belief in objective and absolute truths of existence, which are independent of the perceiving agent and founded in matter (Leach 2004). Realism reproduces, makes sense of, and represents reality, naturalising the status quo (Traill 1996; Jameson 2005). In the world regulated by reason, everyday performance became focused on coherence and efficiency as well as finding truth and clarity through contacting reality through science (McKenzie 2001).

Driven by the passion for exact scientific measurement, the world was divided into strict polarities, which became legitimate truths (McLuhan 1962; Campbell 1987; Meyerhold 1968; Jackson 1981; Gergen 1991; Traill 1996). Previously incomprehensible and inseparable principles, such as fantasy and reality, came into full, independent existence (Suvin 1988; Jameson 2005; Auslander 2008). The division was promoted by Western thought, initiated by Christianity, which saw aesthetic fantasy as a threat to morals and order. These ideas were later adopted and developed by the scientific perspective, which saw fantasy as unrealistic and thus irrational (Hume 1984). Reality gained an ontological supremacy and a moral high ground over fantasy (Agnew 1986; St. James, Handelman, and Taylor 2011), as the latter lay beyond the rational scope of realism (Traill 1996). The real became the exalted indicative, that is, rational and practical, while fantasy became subjunctive, now a domain of commodity and play, omitted from and thus lost to all that

is indicative (Turner 1982). Fantasy was forced into the background as something emotional and thus irrational (Jameson 2005).

The attributes of reality and agency, previously assigned to the sphere of social relationships or religion, were reassigned to the sphere of materiality and commodities (Agnew 1986). The inner and outer worlds of the individual became distinct, and all irrational "flaws" such as fantasy came to be seen as malfunctions to be hidden away within the individual (Mackay 2001). The subjunctive ceased to be taken seriously, as one's values and identity needed to be rational and based in material reality (Turner 1982; Coman 2008; Rowe 2008).

While frowned upon, fantasy was allowed to exist hidden in the mind, as there it could not directly contradict perception or assault scientific findings (Traill 1996). Separated from the now rational and productive domains of work and everyday life, fantasy was placed in the world of entertainment, leisure, and play (Turner 1982; Schechner 2006). Fantasy became viewed as non-productive and expendable; a transportation into escapist Utopia (Stanislavski 1953; Turner 1982; Mackay 2001; Schechner 2006; Coman 2008; Rowe 2008). It was stripped of any symbolic and spiritual function, and disconnected from moral and societal obligations (Campbell 1987).

Reason and rationalisation "freed us" from the possible delusions of fantasy. Any indulgence in such practices was contained by moral, utilitarian imperatives and became the domain of "inferior groups", such as women, children, and the working class (Saler 2012). Fantasy was annihilated from everyday life and turned into something purely entertaining and emotional, existing in the mind of an individual (Campbell 1987). This development was strongly linked to the growing popularity of print media, which was trapping all other media in its logic of text and individualism (Auslander 2008). Illouz (2007) points out that this logic limits our experience, as we lose intuition and insight by focusing only on words and text. The print culture induced people to visualise even the non-visual, and the focus moved from *looking through* media at the world to just *looking at* media (McLuhan 1962). This was embraced and promoted by the growing popularity of photogenic media. Film, and later television, created spectacles for the audience to passively observe, as they captured energy and meaning that is unanimous and anonymous; a performance with which it is impossible to interact (Badiou 1990; Auslander 2008).

Abercombie and Longhurst (1998) present such interaction to involve a *mass audience*, which involves mediated one-way communication that is fragmented and extended in space and time. The result is variable half-attention, into and out of which individuals can move. The experience is global, yet privatised and no longer social, as the distance between the performers and the audience is large and both groups are scattered. This creates only quasi-interaction and low attention (Abercombie and Longhurst 1998). Culture is reduced to autonomous individuals, and collectives are created through each person's connection to objects, not to one another (Auslander 2008; Rowe 2008).

The gap between reality and fantasy was made even more apparent as fantasy transformed into a media spectacle to be simply observed (Campbell 1987; Gergen 1991; Firat 1991; Firat and Venkatesh 1995). The superiority of textual and visual

representation detached sight, sound, and meaning from one another, and reduced ideas to a single understanding. People learned to respond to such media without reaction or involvement, repressing feeling and emotion (McLuhan 1962, 1964; Artaud 1989). Such forms as theatre, film, and television retained the ability to simulate experience and allow the viewer to enter it, but also became very personal and distant to the individual (Auslander 2008). While immensely profitable in its replicability, the personal media became stagnant and separated from the world. It no longer participated in the concerns of everyday life or motivated action, but merely projected images into reality (McLuhan 1962; Meyerhold 1968; Agnew 1986; Eco 1973; Artaud 1989; Carnicke 1998; Auslander 2008). Fantasy was hidden away because of its irrational nature, and became concealed within our individual experiences of entertainment, cut off from the rest of the world.

3.4 Hedonic Rationalised Fantasy

Modernity weaned out play, as Huizinga (1949) notes, but private fantasy driven by new forms of media created spaces of imagination, play, and re-enchantment for adults that were otherwise forbidden within the rational world (Saler 2012). While prejudices and anxieties about "immoral" and "functionless" fantasy still continue today, weariness towards it significantly decreased for several reasons. Fantasy became combined with rationalism in that it was bound by strict rules and cohesive, internally consistent structures; filled with empirical detail and based in a logical background; and supported by objective documentation, such as maps, glossaries, and footnotes (Tolkien 1964; Suvin 1979, 1988; Saler 2012). Based in realism, fantasy does not replace or challenge reality, as it is explicitly marked as non-real. Fantasy rather conforms to and complements reality through similar structures and epistemology, making it drastically different from previous forms of fantasy, which were more epistemologically ambiguous and not severed from the space and place of reality (following Saler 2012). Fantasy became combined with logic, reason, and rationality, as well as artifices of mass culture and the capitalist economic order (Saler 2012). Following the work of Tolkien (1964), Saler (2012) calls this combination of fantasy with reason "ironic imagination". Ironic imagination involves a double consciousness, as people are encouraged to visit a fantasy world and be enchanted and delighted by it, but, at the same time keep a distance and not be deluded by it. These developments made fantasy compatible with reason and logic, thus gaining an acceptable place in the modern world, and allowing individuals to engage in the enchantment, ideals, communal beliefs, and meanings they craved. The result, however, is neither truth nor re-enchantment, but an artificial resource of enchantment (following Saler 2012).

Fantasy became increasingly more visible and diffused in everyday life through cultural and technological developments that allowed a wider distribution of economic prosperity, increased the possibilities for and the amount of leisure time, as well as promoted a greater spread and access to media (Saler 2012). Entertainment and mass media became a normalised part of everyday life, trailing fantasy in its wake. This development popularised recorded and mediatised

performance, thus surpassing live performance, as the former can be spread to more people in less time and with less effort (following Campbell 1987; Auslander 2008). I would suggest that this strong connection with recorded media further concretised fantasy and allowed it to become commodified.

The wide spread of fantasy was greatly aided by consumerism. Fantasy became projected onto consumption products as an attempt to make desires real by materialising them in objects of consumption (Campbell 1987; Williams 1991). Individual daydream fantasies became the vehicle for consumers to experience their desires by taking images from their memory and environment, and rearranging or improving them in a way that is pleasing (Campbell 1987; Sherry 1990; Zizek 1997; Martin 2004). The fantasies create real and lifelike reactions, allowing them to determine possibilities, wants, and tastes. Nevertheless, as I showed earlier, fantasy was locked between the possibility and the consummation of desire, because the former is too perfect for the latter (Campbell 1987; Slater 1997). The consumer is left in a permanent state of dissatisfaction and yearning, as the longing is never extinguished, yet continuously regenerated (Campbell 1987).

Consumerist fantasy was further supported by various new venues that allowed it, such as amusement parks, comic book conventions, the cinema, and, later on, various virtual, online communities (Saler 2012). Saler (2012) argues that spatiality is a central aspect of contemporary fantasy that has been aided by technological developments and marketing endeavours. Just like the novel before them, these spaces allow individuals to play and to engage with meanings (following Huizinga 1949). Fantasy exists in specifically marked off physical spaces, emphasising the creation of a different place and world through highly detailed geographies. As a result, the focus moves from journeying to fantasy worlds onto the worlds themselves (Saler 2012).

Fantasy turned into an activity of consumption placed in escapist leisure (Williams 1991), and structured around forms of entertainment and media (Abercombie and Longhurst 1998; Atwood 2011). Fantasy turned hedonic (Campbell 1987), in which the previously opposite concepts of freedom and desire became combined (Slater 1997). Desires ceased to be socially regulated, thus becoming over-idealised and over-romanticised, unlimited and unstable (Campbell 1987; Slater 1997), scattered and changing (Mackay 2001).

Fantasy became a way of experiencing in an idealised and disinterested way, detached from both self and society (Stanislavski 1989; Conquergood 1998; Kennedy 2009). This passive entertainment (Stanislavski 1953; Brecht 1965; Suvin 1988; Bammer 1991; McAuley 2000; Lin 2012) dazes people with amusement and pleasure by placing them within an illusion accessible at one's leisure (Meyerhold 1968; Turner 1987). Individuals do not express, but only observe and receive information (Eason 1984; McAuley 2000), becoming an audience lost in fantasy instead of active members of society motivated by it (Artaud 1974). Fantasy became an easy and secure tool manipulated by the producer (Jenkins 1992; Stanislavski 1953; Meyerhold 1968) to bind the individual through consumption and escapism (Slater 1997).

All in all, fantasy was accepted into everyday life through its undertaking of rational structures. Fantasy took on the role of a resource for enchantment,

becoming intrinsically tied into consumption and desires. Fantasy turned into a consumption process of looking away from reality, which was supported by its material and spatial separation from reality. This development further reinforced the separation of fantasy and reality by creating structural and spatial distinction.

3.5 Blurred Fantasy and Reality

The totalising logic of modernity could not be withstood for long because of humans' innate incompatibility with and failure to live up to strict rules and order (Turner 1987; Slater 1997). Traditional values were dismantled, but they were not replaced (Slater 1997). The world attacked the master narratives, opening up the possibility for subjective truths and fragmented meanings (Firat and Venkatesh 1995; Schechner 2006). Ultimate truths were erased, and the strict lines previously drawn between fact and fiction were blurred (Gergen 1991; Firat and Venkatesh 1995; Holt 2002; Schechner 2006). However, as I will show in the following sections, the difference and opposition between reality and fantasy was by no means erased through this blurring. Fjellman (1992) writes that within a postmodern world people can still tell the difference between real and fake, but just do not care about it. Once separated and divided, fantasy and reality cannot be reunited, as this would destroy our understanding and articulation of norms of the real world (following Hume 1984; Zizek 1992).

According to Baudrillard (1995), humanity entered, or rather collapsed into, the state of hyperreality, a concept I already touched upon. Cognition and rationality were not dethroned, but rather took place on equal footing with volition and affect, creating the possibility for reflection, as culture turned into a multicentric, contextual, and relative process (Turner 1987; Schechner 1982). Everything became already reproduced, and thus nothing real or unreal remains (Baudrillard 1972). Interpretation no longer refers to intention or signification, but to individual appropriation of the meaning through navigation of culture (Gergen 1991; Firat 1991; Firat and Venkatesh 1995; Levy 1998; Holt 2002; Schechner 2006). Meaning loses its shared aspects and becomes individualised, because it is no longer created, but assembled (Turner 1987; Schechner 1988). Hence, fantasy also becomes personally constructed and interpreted.

Because of the dispersion of all ritual and communal structures, people are no longer taught how to create meaning or interact within a community, resolving rather to mimic what they observe (Schechner 1982). Without the security of ultimate truths, culture became obsessed with information retention, motivated by the hope of obtaining any kind of meaning (Schechner 1982, 2006; Jansson 2002). Consequently, people are no longer given scripts to operate within culture, just bits and pieces of information (Goffman 1959). I visualise these ideas in Picture 4.

Picture 4 "Fragments of Me," acrylics on canvas, 100x100cm

To be interesting enough to engage with in the huge and highly fragmented cultural field, the bits and pieces of information to be reassembled by individuals became entertaining and extremely dramatised (Mackay 2001; McKenzie 2001; Schechner 2006). As Minakov (2004, in Bentley 2004, my translation) exemplifies: "Televised coverage of military conflicts, natural and man-made disasters as well as terrorist attacks resemble scenes from another Hollywood blockbuster" (p. 7). The dominant sources of received information turned into realistic soap operas (Schechner 1988; Peñaloza 2001), and reality was framed as dull and full of discontent (Campbell 1987; Gergen 1991).

Fantasy, now synonymous with consumption of entertainment, became abundant and central to consumer culture through industrial and technological advancements that created its widespread availability and dispersion (Gergen 1991; Kozinets 2001, 2002a; Mackay 2001; Jansson 2002; Illouz 2007). Fantasy took form in media, which began to provide knowledge and norms that form standards for action, emotion, and reaction (Gergen 1991; Kozinets 2001; Jansson 2002; Lin 2012). Media became the realm of recall and repetition of the dramatised, limitless amount of information, the aim of which was to enrich life and set us free through

an endless amount of choice (Baudrillard 1995). However, instead of making life more approachable and full of possibilities, the retention of huge amounts of information created immense anxiety, excess of choice, and an overload of information that dissolves meaning (Baudrillard 1987, 1988, 1995; Slater 1997; Illouz 2007).

In this limitless search and retention, information became possible without experience (Schechner 1985; Campbell 1987). We remember everything perfectly, but, without living memory, meaning is lost as it is anonymous and decontextualised (Barba 1995; Schechner 2006). While our culture became media-centric, we continue to seek live performance, as this is still seen as more real and authentic. However, we also try to retain the live performance, making it recorded and mediatised (following Auslander 2008). The recorded form became customary and popular, with reality starting to take on characteristics of entertainment drama both technologically and ontologically, creating an inversion of structural dependencies of copies upon originals (Baudrillard 1987; Illouz 2007; Auslander 2008). With entertainment and its forms creating a host of temporary master narratives in the form of endless fragmented stories and compressed dramas (Schechner 2006; Illouz 2007), media eventually colonised life by taking over the ontology of liveness, that is, the relational and contextual presence perceived by individuals in interaction with people and things (Auslander 2008). As a result, entertainment became the driver and dominant ideology of culture (Kroker and Cook 1991; Sherry et al. 2001; Schechner 1985, 2006) through giving meaning and content to life (Jansson 2002; Kozinets et al. 2004). This provides momentary relief for the lost link, but never a stable solution.

Following Abercombie and Longhurst (1998) this type of culture involves a *diffused audience*, which is characterised by being universal, having fused communication and low distance between performers and actors, as well as being both private and public. Individuals continuously consume media, and media becomes constitutive of and interwoven with everyday life (Abercombie and Longhurst 1998). Debord's (1994) prediction of society becoming a set of spectacles has thus become true, aided tremendously by broadcasting media and communication networks (Bernard 2009). Abercombie and Longhurst (1998) propose that within contemporary culture, everyone is a part of the diffused audience all the time. Everyday life becomes spectacular and performative, and individuals are required to continuously perform in and be an audience for the spectacle (following Goffman 1959; Debord 1994; Abercombie and Longhurst 1998; Kennedy 2009).

Truth is no longer prescribed to people within the spectacle, as it is not seen as objective or held by any higher power (Auslander 1992; 2008). Truth becomes anything you want to believe (Stanislavski 1991). Nevertheless, individuals continue to perceive media to be connected to an origin or a truth, as its structure feels authentically lifelike and would thus seem to call for it to be based on some reality (Butler 1997; Schechner 2006; Auslander 2008). Therefore, while the experience of fantasy and reality becomes undifferentiated (Baudrillard 1995; Paskow 2004), a strong perception of the distinction between reality and fantasy remains on a subjective level (Goffman 1959; Stanislavski 1989; Baudrillard 1995; Carlson 2003; Grayson and Martinec 2004; Illouz 2007), as the concept of fantasy implies reality

(Butler 1997; Auslander 2008) and sustains this false idea of a difference (Zizek 1997). This means that fantasy and reality do not blur or become indistinguishable, but their difference and opposition are actually enforced. Media no longer reflects life, but produces it (Auslander 2008), while nevertheless implying a reverse relationship. Following Zizek (1997), fantasy supports the symbolic order of everyday life and simultaneously maintains a distance from it.

4 PERFORMANCE

Through adapting to a consciousness of a world of continuously moving objects, detached space, and mobile roles, social and private life became theatrical (Goffman 1959; Agnew 1986; Denzin 2005). While previously the theatrical was a natural *part* of life, the theatrical now became the natural *way* of life (Agnew 1986). As the world became a spectacle to attend and watch (Goffman 1959; Debord 1994; Abercombie and Longhurst 1998; Kennedy 2009), all human activity can now be seen as performance (Schechner 1988; Butler 1990). Here, the self is a role to be played, continuously watched by other people, and always at the centre of attention (Goffman 1959; Abercombie and Longhurst 1998; Leach 2008; Kennedy 2009). Moreover, what is and who can create performances has expanded exponentially with the help of technology and media as well as through the fragmentation of meaning (Carlson 2003), resulting in the difference between performers and their audience being eliminated (Abercombie and Longhurst 1998). Performance, as it is used here, ceases to be confined to the stage, arts, or ritual, and becomes applied to all aspects of life (Schechner 2006).

In this research, I take on performance as a methodological approach (Conquergood 1998; Denzin 2003; Bode 2010). The approach stems from both social sciences and the arts, forming an ontology and epistemology based in experience, participation, and interaction (Pelias and VanOosting 1987; Bode 2010). The focus is on the doing and the lively from a creative, active, and reflexive perspective. The approach blurs the differences between the researcher and the researched, and focuses on events rather than objects (Pelias and VanOosting 1987; Deighton 1992).

It is important to stress that my work is neither directly based in the classical sociological understanding of performance (Goffman 1959), in which performance is involuntarily, yet actively created by the subject; nor the commonly used postmodern approach of performavity (Butler 1990), in which the subject is invoked as a result of the repetition of norms (Brickell 2003). My approach is based in performance studies and embraces both the emergence of the subject through performance, as well as allows for examining the subjective experience of that performance. I elaborate on this throughout this chapter.

Performance in this study becomes a means of exploring and understanding consumer behaviour with a focus on embodied enactments and embodied understanding, stressing action, process, and movement in life (Carlson 2003; Denzin 2003; Turner 1982, 1987). Through its roots in the arts, this perspective further takes up the largely overlooked call to study consumption as aesthetic experience

(Joy and Sherry 2003; Charters 2006; Venkatesh and Meamber 2008; Chronis, Arnould, and Hampton 2013).

4.1 Performance and Consumer Research

The idea of performance has been touched upon within consumer culture research. Most notably, Deighton (1992) and Bode (2010) have called for a more action- and performance-based approach. Some consumer research has also taken on the metaphor of dramaturgy and theatre to study consumption and retail (e.g. Sherry et al. 2001; Kozinets et al. 2004; Beverland and Farrelly 2010). Although not a performance approach per se, this perspective supports my research in many important ways, as I will show later on in this chapter. Other consumption studies have looked at performativity of gender (e.g., Joy, Belk, and Bhardwaj 2015; Thompson and Ustuner 2015). While my research once again differs from such an approach, I do include elements of it in my work.

Traditionally, in looking at consumption as theatre or performance, consumer culture research presents producers as the active performers and consumers as the passive, detached audience (Deighton 1992; Firat and Dholakia 2006). Firat and Dholakia (2006) have proposed that contemporary culture with fragmented meaning and loss of hierarchy makes the stage of performance more inclusive, meaning that consumers can also become actors within performances. Performance nevertheless continues to be seen by consumer researchers as an event that is produced *for* or sometimes *with* consumers (Deighton 1992; Peñaloza 1998; Kozinets et al. 2004; Moisio and Arnould 2005; Joy et al. 2015). While the consumer is presented as becoming an active character rather than just a passive spectator (Moisio and Arnould 2005), the perspective still focuses on how consumers use and interact with the provided products or spaces rather than how they perform their consumption experiences. This point of view leaves individuals at the mercy of the playwright or the director (that is, the producer), keeping alive the idea of a stage and a backstage only open to professional performers. Moreover, while it has been shown that performances can take on various forms (Deighton 1992; Peñaloza 1998), they continue to be predominantly seen as exceptional and spectacle-like (e.g., Kozinets et al. 2004; Tumbat and Belk 2013). Performance continues to only be entertaining, happy, and successful; an accomplishment or a goal, not a process.

It becomes evident that although the metaphor of performance has been used in consumer research, it often assumes a very superficial form, focusing only on the roles of actors and spectators, or front and back stage, which are allocated to consumers and producers accordingly. Consumer culture studies of performance have almost exclusively taken managerial perspectives (Deighton 1992) and been conducted in the context of shopping experiences (Moisio and Arnould 2005; Peñaloza 1998). As a notable exception, Beyes and Steyaert (2006) used theatre performance as a whole for analysing organisations. However, just as in much other research using performance and theatre, they were still interested in

the way an overarching structure works. In this research, I am, instead, focusing on performance as an approach to experience.

4.2 Performance Theory

In order to develop an understanding of performance within consumer culture research, I use performance theory (Schechner 1988, 2006) in this study. The notion of performance has its roots in various disciplines, and has been influenced by both the arts and by social sciences. Most notably, performance has been studied either as behaviour or as discourse. It is important to stress, however, that the different ways of studying performance overlap in many ways and offer support to one another (McKenzie 2001; Harwood and El-Manstrly 2012). My approach involves elements of both.

Performance as behaviour is based on the work of Erving Goffman (1959) as well as Victor Turner's (1969) conceptualisation of the ritual process, which was later developed in collaboration with theatre director Richard Schechner. This stream focuses on the anthropology of performance as well as performance in theatre, and has gained popularity in such fields as theatre studies (e.g. Schechner 1988, 1995, 2006; Parker and Sedgwick 1995; Carlson 2003), race studies (e.g., Johnson 2003), anthropology (e.g., Turner 1982, 1985; St. John 2008; Lewis 2008) and sociology (e.g., Goffman 1959).

The study of performance as discourse has its roots in John L. Austin's (1962) speech-act theory, which presents the idea of performative utterances. Simply put, the theory proposes that, in many contexts, saying things equals doing actions. This has been later developed, among others, by Judith Butler (e.g., 1990, 1993, 2004) into a more detailed understanding of performativity. This perspective has been taken on in gender studies (e.g., Butler 1990; Munoz 1999), organisational theory (e.g., Feldman 2000), as well as literature and language studies (e.g., Austin 1962).

This research focuses on performance as experience, building on the idea of performance theory (see Schechner 1988, 2006). Performance theory proposes that all human action and interaction within the contemporary world can be seen as performances, which are restored from memory and adjusted to the context at hand (Schechner 1988, 2006). The object of study of performance theory is behaviour, its performance, and its performers, with the investigation focusing on the doing, the active, and the lively (Turner 1987; Denzin 2003; Schechner 2006). At the heart of the approach is engagement with social norms and understanding how they work (McKenzie 2001). These elements help to map out how performances are deployed and oriented within individuals' lives, as well as what is stressed and what is omitted within their performances (Schechner 2006).

4.2.1 Defining Performance

Goffman (1959) defined performance as "pre-established patterns of action" (p. 26). Building on this idea, Schechner (2006) conceptualised performance to be restored behaviour, which consists of recreating and "recombining bits of previously behaved behaviours" (p. 35). He continues that performance emerges as repetition and recombination of elements, which have become independent of the context that brought them into existence (Schechner 1985, 2006). The repetition is never exact, as performance changes and reflects its context (Schechner 1982, 2006; McKenzie 2001; McAuley 2000). Each performance nevertheless forms an event in space and time (Bode 2010).

Performance is neither behaviour itself nor the cultural rules and norms guiding it, but rather the reflection and negotiation between the two (Carlson 2003). It exists as the tension between actual doing and the existing blueprint (Turner 1982; Denzin 2003; Dolan 2005; Schechner 2006), with their difference becoming blurred and disappearing (Conquergood 1998). Performance exceeds space (Dolan 2005), and transcends mere physical and embodied actions by spreading into speech, context, being, essence, ideals, and the self (Turner 1985).

Performance is never completed or finished (Goffman 1959; Turner 1987; Schechner 1988, 2006); once it is performed, it is no longer a performance, but a part of the circulation of representation (Auslander 2008). At the same time, we can only understand performance through its disappearance, as we only perceive it to exist once it is gone (Schechner 1985; Auslander 2008).

The focus of performance theory is thus not whether things are repeated (as they always are), but rather *how* things are repeated (Carlson 2003). Movement and action are emphasised, but the individual within the process stays central. Carlson (2003) stresses that this humanises research and allows it to connect to individuals' lives.

4.2.2 Meaning and Performance

There is no performance without it having a past and future recurrence, as understanding of performance emerges only in relation to the repetition (Butler 1997; Schechner 1988, 2006). Our understanding of performance is thus based on memory of the past, which, in turn, is determined and driven forward by goals that point to the future (Schechner 1985; Bruner 1986; Turner 1987; Stanislavski 1991). The repetition of performance creates symbolic and reflexive meaning through arranging and rearranging familiar strips of performance (Turner 1982; Carlson 2003; Butler 1990; Schechner 2006). Performance then accumulates meaning and authority through the prior practices and actions that it echoes, basing itself on a force of historicity (Butler 1993).

Following Schechner (1982), performance allows the transfer of, what he called, performance knowledge. Performance knowledge is the transmission of shared meaning and actions body to body, which occurs through face-to-face interaction (Schechner 1982; Roach 1995). Schechner (1982) believes that traditional culture was largely based on such transfer of knowledge. However, he

continues that performance knowledge has been largely lost to contemporary culture, which is now based on the transfer of knowledge through text and images. Similar to the idea of performance knowledge, Lin (2012) describes how physical closeness expresses social affinities and promotes interactivity, thus creating emotional and cognitive closeness. Debord (1994) also argued that, in the society of the spectacle, we no longer live things directly, but experiences are rather replaced by images. Nevertheless, Schechner (1982) maintains that performance has retained the possibility of the transfer of performance knowledge, even though it is no longer engaged in it.

4.2.3 Performativity, Performance and Performative

Because of the existence of various strands of performance theory, it is important to differentiate the terms performativity, performance, and a performative. Performativity has been described as the "…reiterative power of discourse to produce the phenomena that it regulates and constrains" (Butler 1993, p. 2). It can be seen as the larger term, which encompasses both performances and performatives, opening up their possibility (Schechner 2006). The power of performativity is accrued over time through the process of citing and thus establishing and bringing to life performances (Butler 1997).

Performance refers to the instances of repetition and referencing, which can be either clearly or unclearly marked within culture (Schechner 2006). It is not the direct engagement of performers, but rather their activity repeated over time. This creates the idea of and gives visibility to identity, norms, and social reality (Patton 1995).

A performative is a specific act or actant that constitutes and reproduces citational power (Patton 1995). It is both a noun that refers to something that is being performed, and an adjective, which infects and modifies that something with the qualities of the performance (Schechner 2006). It is neither the actual behaviour nor the cultural rules and norms guiding it, but the reflection and negotiation between the two (Carlson 2003).

Within this research I will focus on performance, as this will help map out individuals' understanding of their selves, their interaction, and their context, as well as the norms surrounding these (Schechner 2006). The focus will then be on: how events are deployed in space and time; how events are controlled, distributed, received, and evaluated; what special spaces or objects are in use; what roles are played and how these differ from what performers usually identify themselves as (Schechner 2006). Nevertheless, it is important to note that while my focus is on performance, performativity and performatives are strongly tied into one another and, hence, are also a part of the research.

4.2.4 Levels of Performance

Performance can be said to emerge from the expression of experience, which is created by its relationship to the context as well as to and among its performers (Denzin 2003; Schechner 1988, 2006). The performer, the context, and the performance are separate, yet cannot exist without each other, as they bring one another into existence (McAuley 2000; Schechner 2006). Consequently, performance emerges and has consequences on three levels of abstraction: the self, interaction, and social structure (following Goffman 1959). These three are inseparable, and exist in a closely intertwined dialogical and dialectical relationship that forms the basis for the performance of everyday life by creating an understanding of what is out there, how it presents itself to our consciousness, and how one's self is established, framed, or articulated within that context (Bruner 1986; Turner 1987; Schechner 2006). Moreover, the tensions between the three levels of abstraction are key to understanding individuals' performances and perceptions of life. Each level can be seen to exist in performativity, performance, and performatives.

I next discuss the self, interaction, and reality from the perspective of performance. All three have both material and social aspects, which need to be kept in mind. I discuss materiality and temporality in a separate passage to emphasise their importance in performance.

4.2.4.1 Self and Performance

Performance always entails people taking on a role. People can be fully, partially, or not at all taken by these roles themselves, but tend to stay in character in order to follow social expectations (Goffman 1959). A person's sense of self is nevertheless tied to the ability to play and believe in the roles they are playing (Goffman 1959; Fine 1986; Schechner 2006).

Identity, used interchangeably with the self (Belk 1988), is understood here to mean an individual's subjective understanding of who they are, which may assume different versions in different situations, but is not usually differentiated by individuals to be different (Goffman 1959). Identity is constructed and its characteristics are performed differently in various situations, creating a number of roles people play, guided by the context, experience, and other people (Mead 1934; Goffman 1959; Schechner 2006). Each role has specific physical and social boundaries, and requires certain competences and responsibilities (Goffman 1974).

Identity is often assumed to pre-exist the elements and interests that are invested in it (Butler 1990). However, from the point of view of performance, the self comes to be only because it is enabled to do so by the repetition of a pre-existing set of performances (Butler 1993). There is no pre-existing self, only "the taking up of the tools which is enabled by the tool lying there" (Butler 1990, p. 145). The self is invoked by its performance, temporarily becoming a performance in itself (Butler 1993). This process is mobilised by a long series of interpellations, allowing the status of self to exist by citing its performance (Butler 1997). The performance does not constitute the self: performance merely designates, struc-

tures, and maintains the social phenomena to which it refers (Butler 1990, 1993; Parker and Sedgwick 1995). While the self is a consequence of performance, the performance in itself is not addressable, causing the origin of performance to be masked in the self (Goffman 1959, Butler 1990, 1997). The self emerges as it is performed, confusing our understanding of its origin.

The existence and need for a self are driven by our desire to be recognised by others. Performance is thus never done alone, but always for another, even if it is an imagined one (Butler 2004; Schechner 1988, 2006). Through a need to be recognised, we submit to norms (Butler 2005), which creates a self invested with social meaning (Johnson 2003), but also a self alike to all others (Butler 1990). The continuation of the self is maintained through its accounts, which make identity recognisable and understandable, but also substitutable and even interchangeable, as it is supported by terms not of our own making (Butler 2005).

We often refer to the self as located in a world that is corporeal, substantial, and material (Goffman 1974; Butler 1990; Johnson 2003). Materiality and matter are an effect of performance (Goffman 1974), and in order to understand it we reference it to a mediating boundary that stabilises and consolidates a coherent subject (Butler 1990, 2004). The body becomes a tool for understanding identity, the world, and interaction in it, as it is our only connection to materiality (Grotowski 1968; Artaud 1989; Leach 2008). The contemporary understanding of the self that separates thought and action views the body as a hindrance (Slater 1997; Blanchette 2014), at most the mainstay of identity (Armitt 1996). The body, however, is a boundary, through the reference of which an idea of an inner and an outer makes sense. This boundary strives for stability, creating a perception that it is natural (Butler 1990, 1993, 2004).

4.2.4.2 Interaction and Performance

Performance is perceived individually, but fine-tuned through relating to other people (Kapferer 1986; Bruner 1986; Turner 1987). The meaning of performances is recovered through encountering, being recognised by, and influencing other people, as well as sharing experiences with them (Goffman 1959; Schechner 1985; Turner 1982, 1987). The self is nevertheless an integral part of social interaction, always aiming to create relationships with and connections to other people (Mead 1934; Butler 2005; McConachie 2008). These involve dynamic intersubjectivity between a person and a group, which reinforce and constitute the understanding of performance (Lewis 2008).

For an individual's performance to become significant to others, it must be mobilised in a way that expresses the meaning the performer wishes to convey (Goffman 1959). Individuals further sympathise with others and acquire information about them in order to create mutual understanding (Goffman 1959; Agnew 1986). Performance thus always involves performers and an audience (Goffman 1974; Ambercombie and Longhurst 1998). Goffman (1959) proposed that in the absence of other people, performers imagine audience members or simultaneously take the place of one.

Your performances are never truly your own, as they precede you and are adjusted to the domain of doable things (Butler 1993, 1997). Performance is not a single act, but repetition and reiteration of acts, which are socially typified, that is, their meaning is created by fitting into the social, cultural, and role-specific context (Kapferer 1986; Butler 1993; Schechner 1988). Understanding is guided by conventions, which grow out of the distribution of knowledge we are acculturated into, and are the result of repeated experiences (Goffman 1959; Turner 1987; Becker 1982). The repetition of performance over time creates the effect of naturalised norms that cannot be reduced to or fully extricated from their instantiations, as they are invoked by their citation (Butler 1993; Brickell 2003). Norms bind performance, as they legitimate and make it intelligible by structuring knowledge, meaning, and reality (Butler 1993, 2004).

Norms have a dual, contradicting meaning in our interaction. On the one hand, they guide and orient performance within its context, opening up possibilities of meaning and shared understanding. On the other hand, they produce parameters and conditions that govern life, thus constraining performance (Carlson 2003; Butler 2004). Norms become built upon norms and lose their meaning without one another (Butler 1993, 2004). As a result, it is quite unlikely for anything completely new or spontaneous to emerge in performance (Butler 1990; Chekhov 1995). Norms precede, constrain, and exceed performance and thus cannot be taken as the fabrication of a performer's will or choice (Butler 1993). However, norms do not have final control, because, within performance, nothing is definitionally settled (Parker and Sedgwick 1995). Norms are ideal and can never be fully approximated by performance (Butler 1993). Moreover, repetition is not exact or stable, and can involve interpretation, misinterpretation, and even failure of performances (Turner 1982; Schechner 1988; 2006; Butler 1990), thus creating the possibility of agency (Butler 1990, 1994, 2004). Agency thus does not equal control over performance, as performance only exists as it cites previous instances of itself, but it emerges as the possibility of variation of repetition (Butler 1990). The possibility of agency is the "hiatus of iterability", the performance's failure to repeat loyally (Butler 1993), which nevertheless cannot exist outside the norms that give it intelligibility (Butler 1990).

4.2.4.3 Social Structure and Performance

Through their shared and reflective quality, performances allow individuals' identities to emerge, communities to connect and remain together, and the cultural world that we perceive as reality to become constituted (Goffman 1959; Carlson 2003; Schechner 2006). This interaction among individuals fosters a social structure that is an immense performance site, through which an impression of reality inseparable from its participants and their interaction is created (Turner 1987; Butler 1997; Paskow 2004; McKenzie 2001; Schechner 2006). Hence, in addition to interacting with others, individuals interact with the social structure, that is, the sum of recurring patterns of interaction that turn into habits and norms (Berger and Luckmann 1966).

By experiencing performances within a certain spatial and temporal context, people form knowledge of and belief in the world. These are supported by a set of value judgments as well as a system of ideals and principles of conduct, which form the point of contact of performance and norm (Turner 1987). Through the maintenance of conventions and reaffirmation of performance, social order is created and maintained. This results in the context-specific social structure of everyday life, which is perceived by individuals to be reality (Goffman 1974). Just like identity, reality seemingly pre-exists performance. However, from the point of view of performance theory, it is actually a result of performance.

Realness becomes a standard that is used to judge any given performance within the established categories (Butler 1993). According to Goffman (1974), reality is always a term of contrast; it is the relationship, not the substance that is sovereign. "When we decide something is unreal, the reality it isn't need not itself be very real," he explains (p. 560). Nevertheless, the world of common sense and daily life is usually taken for paramount reality. Everyday life becomes the archetype of our experience of reality, with all others being modifications (Schutz 1982).

Goffman (1974) proposed that performance is structured around and organised into frames, that is, situational definitions "constructed in accord with organizing principles that govern both the events themselves and participants experiences of these events" (pp. 10-11). Frames organise experience and help individuals make sense of it (Goffman 1974). Scheff (2005) pointed out that Goffman was quite unclear as to what "frame" actually means, which has lead to considerable misuse of the concept. Scheff proposes that frame implies context, with the central issue being individuals' mutual awareness of norms that guide the context in question. In contemporary research, frame analysis has been developed into three clear streams that see frames as organising behaviour through cognitive structures (cognitive-heuristics), habits and norms (habitual-frame-categories), or words and language (linguistic) (Putnam and Holmer 1992). In this research, I take a more classic approach to frame analysis, which focuses on norms and habits, as this is how it has been used in performance studies.

Following Goffman (1974), performance always involves the *primary framework*, which is the main frame perceived by individuals to be paramount reality. Everyday life, for instance would be perceived as one's primary framework. Other frames build on the primary frame by keying, that is, transforming performance into its laminations, which are layers between an act and the model act that it refers to. This means that performance, already meaningful in terms of a primary frame, is transformed and perceived as something quite different by the participant within the keyed frame. For instance, a person talking to himself on the street would seem mad, but the same performance on the stage of a theatre turns into a beautiful monologue. While performance often involves different frames, these are rarely directly perceived or differentiated by people.

All frames involve rules and limits, which most commonly emerge in the form of norms and conventions. These are both natural (i.e. physical) and social, and assign to individuals specific roles, as well as the positions and possibilities of the roles in the specific frame. Frames can be re-keyed, that is re-interpreted, through the various meanings we gain in our performances. The re-interpretations

of frames are perceived differently depending on one's point of view, with the innermost frame being what the people engrossed in performance experience, and the outermost frame, or the rim, being how the performance is seen from an outsider perspective, that is, the performance's position in reality (Goffman 1974). Goffman (1974) seemed to imply that frames always create a hierarchy of sorts, as he described frames always fitting in or adding to one another. A keying thus always fits into a larger frame of what it is keying, which, in turn, fits into a larger frame, etc.

4.2.5 Space and Time of Performance

Performance is always an event in a specific space and time (Bode 2010). Space is fluid and contextual (Borden 2001). It has no reality without the performance deployed in it, and thus emerges as an effect and negation of performances that transpire in it (McAuley 2000). However, performance and its performers presuppose space, an illusion that is based on the seemingly natural and transparent essence of space, which is created by its repetition (Butler 2004). Space allots reality to performance, and conditions the presence and actions of individuals (McAuley 2000). Space further ensures cohesion and continuity of performance by enforcing the repetition of structures and relations (Lefebvre 1991; Butler 2004). Hence, space and performance co-exist, as each infuses the other with reality (Lefebvre 1991; McAuley 2000). Moreover, space can become a powerful tool of domination that controls the flow and production of performances (Lefebvre 1991; Butler 2004).

Lefebvre (1991) describes space as a social product; abstract, yet real in our experience. He nevertheless stresses that space is not a material reality existing in itself. It rather consists of three elements: perceived space (the materiality of space as felt by the senses), conceived space (the pre-conceived knowledge and representation of space), and lived space (the experience of space). Space is thus a dialectic production (Borden 2001).

Space is typically understood as the more general term, while *place* is a distinct and meaningful space, one that is consumed by individuals (Zukin 1991; Visconti et al. 2010). Place is not the location or the objects in it, but is formed by the intention and attitude of, as well as the relationship to the person in it (Relph 1980). Relph (1980) stresses that place is essential to human existence, as person and place define one another and are thus inseparable. Moreover, the continuity of place is central to creating a sense of reality.

Zukin (1991) argues that we are moving away from the idea of place in contemporary Western culture, as value is being abstracted from material products into images and symbols, and meaning creation is shifting from production to consumption. This is supported by the market becoming separated from place (Agnew 1986), with the two now clashing, as place focuses on creating stability, while the market aims to create variety. As social life and culture are now dependent on consumption, place is produced as a consumer product. Consequently, it is consumption that creates a sense of place (Zukin 1991). Relph (1980) similarly

proposes that contemporary culture supports "placelessness", that is, we are losing a sense of place, an awareness of its symbolic significance, and an appreciation of its identity. Place becomes mostly functional, rational, uncritical, and superficial. It becomes a vessel of mass values and consumption, and gains a "correct" way of being in it, erasing the possibility of personal and communal meaning. Relph (1980) concludes that contemporary place is rational, yet absurd: there is no order because of fragmentation, yet mass values cause us to feel that there should only be one way of experiencing place. This links back to the idea of performance and space co-creating one another.

While space is not material, materiality seems to be something we cannot do without, as it has become a sign of irreducibility that can be used to ground and verify our context and our selves (Butler 1993). Our understanding of the world is imposed under a rule of logic through the illusion of a pre-existing reality that is bound in space (Lefebvre 1991). Such a common sense understanding of reality is often taken for granted (Bergen and Luckmann 1966; Schutz 1982; Butler 1993), as coherence is desired, wished for, and idealised (Butler 1990). Schutz (1982) further proposed that the everyday world is perceived as paramount reality because we always participate in it by means of our bodies. The physical world becomes a realm, in which we can objectively delimit ourselves and our possibilities, as well as communicate with one another clearly (Schutz 1982). Yet matter is not a site or surface, but a "process of materialisation that stabilises over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity, and surface" (Butler 1993, p. 9). Materiality is multiple and negotiated, but, through its contextual reiteration, results in the appearance of substance and temporality (Goffman 1974; Butler 1990).

In addition to space, performance happens in time. Temporality is intrinsically tied into embodiment, intersubjectivity, and one's social surroundings (Fuchs 2010), thus playing an important part on all levels of performance. Time is mainly experienced implicitly and unreflexively as an undercurrent of experience (Fuchs 2010). Such "lived time" has a basis in the past and is directed at a future, and allows the synthesis of experience in the present to create a personal chronological consistency (Wyllie 2005). Implicit time has a social dimension in that it is synchronised with other people's and with social processes to form intersubjective time (Wyllie 2005; Fuchs 2010). This allows individuals to be in accord with each other and with their surroundings, creating a sense of a whole and of well-being (Fuchs 2010). Lived time involves a lived body, which is tacit and unreflexive in its experience, but allows habitual, normalised action and interaction, as well as a sense of reality (Ratcliffe 2008; Fuchs and Schlimme 2009).

Through interruption or disturbance, implicit time can become explicit (Fuchs 2010). I visualise this idea in Picture 5. The flow of lived time is broken, creating a rift, in which both time and body become consciously felt, separate, and external (Fucks and Schlimme 2009). The repetition of performance is thus interrupted. Explicit time involves desynthesised personal time, as it unfolds itself in the present, past, and future. The past and future are cut off from the present, with the past becoming lost and the future unreachable. This can result in both painful and exhilarating experiences (Fuchs and Schlimme 2009; Fuchs 2010). Explicit time also disrupts intersubjectivity, as time is desynchronised from other

individuals and from social processes (Fuchs 2010). The body is experienced as objective (Fuchs and Schlimme 2009), almost a double body, which is both lived and reflected on (Wyllie 2005). Explicit time is resynthesised and resynchronised through actively leading life and thus returning to habits and norms (Fuchs 2010).

Picture 5 "Desynchronised," acrylics on canvas, 40x40cm

4.3 Social and Aesthetic Performance

Performances are endless series of transformations, which take on various forms, the main categories of which are social and aesthetic performances (Turner 1987; Schechner 1988, 2006; McKenzie 2001). The former is perceived to constitute the actual and material quotidian life (Turner 1987; Butler 1990) that aims to define the real (McKenzie 2001), while the latter is seen to have a second order and referential relationship to reality and matter (Butler 1990 1993; Lin 2012).

In the contemporary cultural context with fragmented meaning, performance can no longer be differentiated through categories, as their definitions become an issue of context and one's place in it (Goffman 1959; Slater 1997; Schechner 2006). The loss of the hierarchy of performances results in the blurring of actual and referential performances (Schechner 1982, 1993). The elements to be used in restored behaviour become equal, and the contexts retaining them temporary and contingent (Schechner 1982, 1988; Turner 1987). The difference between aesthetic and social performance becomes very difficult to specify, with possibly only the thinnest dissolving membrane separating them (Schechner 1988, 2006; Baudrillard 1983). The two are continuous and blend into one another (Cooper 1997). Consumer culture research has similarly noted that aesthetic and everyday performances overlap in many ways and have become increasingly difficult to distinguish (e.g., Joy and Sherry 2003, 2004; Venkatesh et al. 2010; Joy et al. 2015).

People nevertheless continue to make the difference between aesthetic and social performances based on the context and associated norms (Schechner 2006;

Auslander 2008). Stereotypically, social performances are seen as instrumental and practical. They involve more variables than their aesthetic counterparts and their outcome is always in doubt, even though many of their aspects are rehearsed and foreknown (Schechner 1988, 2006). Aesthetic performance, on the other hand, is typically seen as ornamental, prearranged, predetermined, and the focus of display (Schechner 1988, 2006).

A central concern of performance theory is understanding how social and aesthetic performances interact and exist alongside one another, where one begins and the other ends, and what their relationship is to materiality (Schechner 1982, 2006; Carlson 2003; McAuley 2000; McKenzie 2001; Butler 2004). Aesthetic and social performances do not create a binary, but rather exist in a relationship of cross-feed: what touches one vibrates into the other (Schechner 1988), as they influence and reflect one another (Artaud 1974; Turner 1987; Butler 1993; Parker and Sedgwick 1995; Leach 2004; Lin 2012).

To conceptualise the relationship of social and aesthetic performances, Richard Schechner (1988) created the idea of the infinity loop, which he has subsequently developed with the help of Victor Turner (see Turner 1982, 1985, 1987; Schechner 1988, 1993, 2006). In essence, the infinity loop presents social performance as flowing in and out of aesthetic performance and vice versa, feeding their meanings into one another and thus creating an elaborate feedback system (Turner 1987). Social drama is informed, shaped, conditioned, and guided by underlying principles and ideas taken from aesthetics (Schechner 1988). Reciprocally, aesthetic drama is underlined in the same way by social interaction (see Figure 1 and Picture 6). The reflections are multiple and never faithful to their counterpart, resulting in distortion inversion (Turner 1982), addition and modifications (Turner 1985). Therefore, the pattern is not cyclical, as its name would imply, but it spirals, continuously building on itself (Turner 1990).

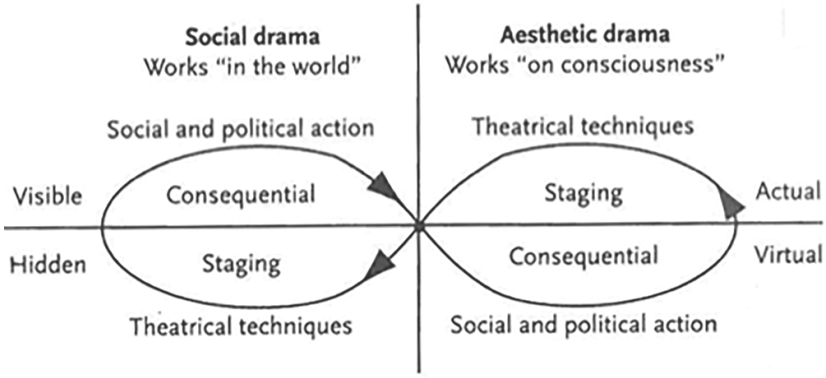


Figure 1 The "infinity loop" proposed by Richard Schechner and Victor Turner (Schechner 1988, p. 215; originally published in 1977)

Picture 6 "Exploring Fantasy as Part of Consumption," acrylics on canvas, 38x46cm x 2. The art piece represents Turner's and Schechner's infinity loop as applied to the study of the experience of fantasy. This is tied into an earlier theorisation of this study that was later discarded.

The two sides of the loop become of equal value, shadow images of each other that are analogous states of cognition and perception, contesting and reinforcing one another through their difference (Schechner 2006; Lewis 2008). Our ends, meanings, and values become entangled in their complex interaction (Turner 1982, 1987; Schechner 1988), which allows social norms to be carried over into aesthetic practices, binding both to convention and creating the bridge between the two (Boruah 1988). Simultaneously, through its interactive relationship to social performance, aesthetic performance becomes a powerful tool for organising and understanding societies through showing and inspiring possibility (Bammer 1991; Dolan 2005). It extends reality (Artaud 1989), links us to it in new ways (Dolan 2005), and makes new elements accessible to us (Stanislavski 1989).

In their conceptualisation, Schechner and Turner presented social and aesthetic performance as forming a continuum. Pitches and Popat (2011) problematised this idea, suggesting that such a continuum results in the concept of performance colonising all behaviour and thus showing us nothing. In order to move from a linear to a more holistic approach of discerning differences between and relationships among different performances, they proposed to analyse performances from the point of view of their various elements. Pitches and Popat (2011) map out the central elements to be body, space, time, technology, interactivity, and organisation. I keep these aspects in mind when analysing performance in my study.

4.4 Aesthetic Performance

As I discussed earlier, strong parallels can be drawn between the concepts of fantasy and aesthetics. Consequently, I use aesthetic performance as a model for exploring fantasy performance. This allows me to tap into the experience of, relationship to, and negotiation of fantasy as a part of individuals' everyday lives, as well as explore its relationship to the performance of reality. Next, I elaborate in more detail on the concept of aesthetic performance and the way I use it in my research.

4.4.1 Defining Aesthetic Performance

In the Western world, aesthetics are traditionally set apart from everyday life (Venkatesh and Meamber 2006, 2008). Aesthetic performances are seen to have little perceivable influence on individuals' everyday lives (Goffman 1959; Turner 1987; Boruah 1988; Schechner 2006) because they exist outside the norms of self, interaction, and space (Turner 1987; Schechner 2006). Nevertheless, as I have already shown, aesthetic performance relates to the real (Badiou 1990), as it is always a part of the culture it emerges from (McAuley 2000; McKenzie 2001; Carlson 2003).

Aesthetics has been acknowledged to be a significant part of consumers' lives (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982; Hirschman 1987). Venkatesh and Meamber (2008) have shown that aesthetics have become a part of everyday life, helping form meaning, tastes, and identity (see also Joy 2000). Following Brown's (1996) typology, consumer research has mostly explored aesthetics either as "consumption in art", that is, consumption in art-related contexts (e.g., Hirschman 1988; Schroeder 2006; Volkmann and de Cock 2006; Kerrigan, O'Reilly, and von Lehn 2009), or as "art in consumption", that is, consumer research applying theoretical and methodological perspectives developed for analysing art (e.g., Stern 1989; Scott 1994; Guillet de Monthoux and Strati 2002; Rippin 2006). A few studies have also used art as examples and metaphors (Piñeiro 2002; Weiskopf 2002), as an analytical tool (Borgerson 2002; Beyes and Steyaert 2006; Warren and Rehn 2006), and as data (Bradshaw, McDonagh, and Marshall 2006). As Charters (2006) points out, a great deal of consumer research tends to confuse the ideas of aesthetic product and aesthetic consumption. The former involves an aesthetic component as its primary value, while the latter is an expressive experience (Charters 2006).

The roots of aesthetic performance lie in the concept of *mimesis*, which involves seeing art as the imitation of reality (Goffman 1959; Bode 2010). Coleridge (1906) juxtaposes imitation with copying, stressing that creative manipulation of art is what makes it different from mere copying of reality. Aristotle saw mimesis as a fundamental expression of human experience based in art. He believed mimesis to allow us to learn about and thus come closer to "truth". Art is not believed to be reality from this perspective, but the representation becomes valid and acceptable, as it has a similar logic to the real world. Central to this idea is the fact that Aristotle believed knowledge of truth to be based in observable reality. In

art, knowledge can only be drawn through the distance kept between art and life. Observers of art need to recognise elements and identify with them in order to be moved by them, creating understanding of the universal through the particular (Kirby 1991; Pitches 2006, 2007b; Lewis 2007, 2008).

For Plato, the mimetic world is inferior and even deceitful, because the truth of things cannot be found in the material world, but it rather lies in intellectual abstraction. These intellectual truths, or Forms as Plato called them, are more real and important than physical substance or the world of senses. Consequently, observations based in these are highly unreliable and even immoral. Art is a flawed copy of something already imperfect and is thus irrelevant to truth. Mimesis, according to Plato, is illusory in being thrice removed from truth; a subordinate copy of reality, which does not represent true knowledge. He believed that art can destabilise society by disassociating it from the real (Kirby 1991; Pitches 2006, 2007a, 2007b; Lewis 2007).

In mapping out performance theory, Turner (1982) stressed that it is important to move away from the idea of art and performance as imitation, reflection, and mirroring of life. Conquergood (1998) adds that such a view is incomplete, as it focuses on the surface and upholds the duality of life and art. Art should rather be viewed as *poiesis*, the imaginative creation of reality and the generation of something that is not there (Turner 1982; Bode 2010). Poiesis is creative and constructive, as it engages with deeper levels of meaning, moving beyond the mirroring of appearance toward enlightenment (Madison 2012). From this perspective, life informs and is in the service of art. At the same time, art is also subordinate to life, as the latter is its focus (Venkatesh and Meamber 2006, 2008).

Conquergood (1998) goes even further, and proposes that we should move towards art as *kinesis*, which involves movement, fluidity, and fluctuation. Here, aesthetic performance is processual and aims to create change and intervention rather than just describe the world (Madison 2012). Kinesis emerges through practices that disrupt and subvert authority (Conquergood 1998).

In line with ideas on poiesis and kinesis, some consumer researchers have stressed that we cannot explore art and life as separate entities, as the two interact and seep into one another (Charters 2006; Schroeder 2006; Venkatesh and Meamber 2006, 2008; Bode 2010). Joy and Sherry (2003), in their study of art appreciation in museums, opened the door to documenting and interpreting aesthetics as embodied experiences. Such a perspective does not consider aesthetics as a context or a theoretical tool, but rather explores consumption *as* aesthetics. From this point of view, aesthetics is seen as a type of experience, engagement and communication, which is expressive and symbolic, emotionally and/or spiritually moving, has strong cognitive, sensory, and affective components, and engages elements seen as art (following Charters 2006). I follow these ideas in my research, approaching fantasy performance as bodily aesthetic performance.

4.4.2 Theatre Performance

Aesthetic performance takes on various forms. In the context of this research, I focus on the perspective of theatrical performance. More specifically, in order to explore how individuals perform fantasy from a bodily and holistic point of view, the research will adopt the perspective of a performer of theatrical performance.

Theatre is a fitting choice because it is one of the only media of aesthetic performance that has remained bodily and active (Carlson 1995; McAuley 2000; Schechner 2006; Auslander 2008). Theatre performance is active, reflective, and participatory for both performers and spectators (Auslander 1992, 2008; Schechner 2006). Unlike very directed aesthetic performance such as film-making, theatre does not condense or fragment performance (McLuhan 1964), and gives full control to the performer (Schechner 1988; Carnicke 1998). It is live performance (Auslander 2008), as it is perishable and ethereal (Badiou 1990). Moreover, theatre performance always involves art, play, and make-believe (Stanislavski 1953, 1989; Vahtangov 1984; Leach 2004, 2008; Conquergood 1991; Badiou 1990), which are all central to fantasy, as I demonstrated in the previous chapter. Theatre allows individuals to enter fantasy and become a part of it, as it requires a physical presence and awareness from both performers and spectators (Carlson 1995; McAuley 2000; Schechner 2006; Auslander 2008; Bode 2010).

Theatrical aesthetic performance is easier to approach in terms of research because it emerges as physical, active, and consciously reflective processes (Schechner 2006). Theatre performance is always material and corporeal, based in defined and limited space (Badiou 1990; Weber 2004). It enacts, frames, and controls human interaction by actualising it in a visible, sonic, and tactile event (Stanislavski 1953; Goffman 1959; Schechner 1988; Dolan 2005; Leach 2008). Theatre thus allows an understanding of aesthetic experiences, which is embodied and holistic, a perspective often overlooked in consumer research (following Joy and Sherry 2003).

Theatrical performances take the form of the following time-space sequence, which has been described by Richard Schechner (2006). This sequence is composed of three larger phases: proto-performance, performance, and aftermath. While the structure is described in the context of theatre, the three phases are also applicable to other kinds of performances, such as entertainment, rituals, and everyday life (Schechner 2006). This is because social and aesthetic performances are similar in their structure and constitutive elements (Goffman 1959; Badiou 1990).

Proto-performance involves processes that precede and give rise to the performance. This phase begins with each participant of the performance having their own understanding and version of the performance and involves the weaving of these into a coherent whole. Proto-performance starts with training, during which specific skills are learned and mistakes are corrected. This is followed by workshops, which are active research phases used to explore processes that will be useful in rehearsals and making the performance. Workshops are used to exchange ideas, techniques, and approaches, as well as to help individuals reorganise and develop their possibilities. Elements emerging in workshops are built up into the form of a performance in rehearsals. The rehearsal builds, fills in, cuts, and modi-

fies, bringing a finished product into harmony with the process that produces it (Schechner 2006).

The performance phase begins with a warm up, which is the formal or informal preparation for the performance. The actual performance takes place between a marked beginning and end. The performance is cultural, contextual, and operates as a part of wider economic and social activities. After the performance ends, a cooling down phase begins, which focuses on letting go of the performance and works as a fairly informal bridge leading from the focused activity of the performance to the more open and diffused experience of everyday life (Schechner 2006).

The aftermath of the theatrical performance takes place after the performance has ended and aims to reconstruct what happened during the performance. The phase is indefinite in duration and fades away easily. The aftermath persists in physical evidence and prolongs the ephemeral existence of performances. It can be formal or open-ended, and tends to be made up of critical responses coming from official levels outside the performance, archiving of the performance, and the personal memories of individuals involved in the performance (Schechner 2006).

4.4.3 Levels of Theatrical Performance

Because social and aesthetic performances reflect one another, the three levels of abstraction, that is, the self, interaction, and society (Goffman 1959), are also applicable to aesthetic performance. Aesthetic performance is in many ways more complex that social performance, because it involves conscious, reflexive, and purposeful construction (Schechner 1982, 1988, 2006). There is nothing redundant or unknown in aesthetic performance, as everything is created with a purpose (Stanislavski 1989). Moreover, such performance exists both in the social and fictional worlds, and depends on knowledge and interaction based in both of the contexts (McAuley 2000). Next, I discuss the three levels of abstraction of performance from the perspective of theatrical performance.

4.4.3.1 Self and Theatrical Performance

From the perspective of the performer, aesthetic performance does not present fixed identities, roles, or norms to people to the same extent that quotidian performances do (Schechner 2006). The roles are not perceived to be real or to involve the consequences of real roles (Goffman 1959). This makes the role being performed more ephemeral than the roles of everyday life, because the former can only exist as it is performed in the limited, embodied context of theatre (Badiou 1990).

The way the self as well as the body is experienced and performed has always been a contested subject in the realm of theatre, as I will show in more detail through the discussion of the various streams of theatre performance. One perspective maintains that the self becomes something in between the self and the

character. In short, the self is never lost, yet otherness is never fully achieved, and thus a new, in-between self emerges within the artificial context of theatrical performance (Jackson 1981; Hoogland 2002; Paskow 2004; Schechner 2006; Leach 2008). The effect is an individual that is not the self, but is also not not the self (Schechner 2006).

Most commonly, theatre performance is thought to take on a duality of self. The performer retains their own self, but also creates a distance to it, as aesthetic performance requires them to consciously take on a different self in the form of a character (Abrahams 1986; Badiou 1990; McAuley 2000).

Fine (1983) and McAuley (2000) extend the notion of doubleness and propose that three elements of the self work simultaneously in theatrical performance: the self, the character, and the performer between these. According to Fine (1983), there is a separation of knowledge and a pretence separation of awareness among the three selves. The individual has a right and a responsibility to know both the self and the performer. However, existing in a different reality, the character should theoretically be unaware of the self and the performer, as well as their realities and associated knowledge. In a similar way, the self and the performer cannot fully be aware of the character or their reality, as these are never fully immersed in. The result should be a closed and constrained awareness of each of the three elements of the self. Through these ideas, Fine (1983) extends our understanding of juggling multiple frames and the roles that are a part of them, but leaves a few loose ends in terms of understanding the engagement of individuals with fantasy as well as the effects this interaction has on their identities. I present and address these in my findings and discussion.

4.4.3.2 Interaction and Theatrical Performance

Similar to social performance, aesthetic performance thrives on interaction among individuals within their context (Artaud 1974, 1989; McAuley 2000). Aesthetic performance becomes complicated on this level of abstraction by its clear division of various roles among individuals. Many roles are needed to prepare and give life to a theatre performance (McAuley 2000; Schechner 2006). Following Schechner (2006), these can be roughly divided into four groups: sourcers (authors, composers, dramaturges, etc.), producers (directors, designers, technicians, business staff, etc.), performers, and partakers (spectators, fans, juries, the public, etc.). Sourcers give rise to the performance, and producers transform sources into publicly performed events through performers. Performers play the actions, while partakers receive the actions and, depending on the perspective and requirements of the performance, sometimes participate in them (Schechner 2006). The four categories are not mutually exclusive, and, according to the various perspectives on theatrical performance, differ in their relationships and hierarchies (Stanislavski 1953; Brecht 1965; Meyerhold 1968; Schechner 2006). Theoretically, all connections are of equal weight (Schechner 2006), with the ideal taking form in Meyerhold's (1968) theatre of the straight line, in which interpretation passes from sourcer to producer to performer to partaker. Nevertheless, in practice, theatrical performances are often ruled by the director (Carlson 2003; Schechner 2006).

According to Badiou (1990), each category of roles has its own set of dialectics. The directors are objective and concerned with what the theatrical performance is about. The performers are subjective and focus on what actually happens during a performance. Lastly, the spectators are in the position of absolute knowledge, as they can prescribe the performance meaning. Badiou (1990) does not consider sourcers to be a group that is a part of the actual performance, but rather to be the referent that is used as the basis for performance.

During the actual theatrical performance, two main groups emerge: performers and spectators (McAuley 2000; Schechner 2006; Kennedy 2009). As this research focuses on the experience of the performance itself, these two groups will take the central role in my research and analysis. For a theatre performance to take place, performers and spectators need to be physically present, with the former ready to interact and the latter ready to respond (Badiou 1990). The two groups are also characterised and connected by their physical and social distance that separates them and gives the performance mystique (Abercombie and Longhurst 1998). Physicality and materiality can come into play in different ways within theatre performance, as I will show in more detail through the different streams of theatre performance.

Performance emerges as the relationships within and among groups of performers and spectators (McAuley 2000). The performers interact on the three levels of awareness: as people in a social context, as performers in the presentational context, and as characters in the fictional context (Stanislavski 1953; Meyerhold 1968; Barba 1995; McAuley 2000). Aesthetic performance always needs an audience, even when it is done alone. In this case, our self-consciousness is the audience to our own performance (Homan 1989). While the spectator perspective is often neglected and seen as passive, it also plays an important and inseparable part in the theatre performance and thus always needs to be acknowledged (Vahtangov 1984; McAuley 2000; Kennedy 2009). Homan (1989) points out that the audience supports theatre performance in three ways: it is practical (invokes response), symbolic (reveals the world of the performance as fictive), and philosophical. The audience is restricted by the event and relinquishes a part of its agency to assist the performance. For instance, spectators communicate mainly through highly ordered gestures, such as applause (Kennedy 2009).

4.4.3.3 Social Space and Theatrical Performance

In addition to the people present and interacting, theatrical performance involves the performance of a different social structure and a different space. The performance is an encounter organised in a singular time and space, composed and imposed as true in that moment (Goffman 1959; Abrahams 1986; Schechner 1988, 2006; Badiou 1990). Each theatrical performance is unique and cannot be repeated exactly, as its repetition creates a new reality and a new present each time (Kapferer 1986; Badiou 1990; Schechner 2006).

Performance of reality and materiality are changed, as aesthetic performance shifts awareness and makes elsewhere materially present (McAuley 2000). Theatre creates a fictive space and time that can twist, condense, skip and/or go beyond

our understanding of reality (Badiou 1990). The performance can neither be contained in nor be separated from the place they unfold in (Weber 2004). The created other space emerges through a space, décor, costumes, and props reserved for the performance (Badiou 1990). Space and social structure are indivisible in the ephemeral, embodied performance of theatre. Hence, in my analysis, I combine the discussion of the two under one topic of social space.

Theatrical performance allows us to approach theatre-truths, that is, forms of knowledge that are embodied and not available outside of the theatre performance. Theatre-truths do not present reality or ultimate truths, but rather capture some aspect of popular intelligence that gives us insight within the context of the aesthetic performance (Badiou 1990). The truth is eternal, singular, and universal, yet simultaneously perishable and open-ended. It clarifies our place in space and time through the encounter between eternity and an instant within artificial time (Badiou 1990). Theatre-truth is similar to Schechner's (1988) idea of performative bodily knowledge, which is collective and embodied truth that passes from body to body (Schechner 1988; Roach 1995).

In performing theatre, we also enter the arena of social performance (Schechner 1986, 1993, 2006; Lin 2012). The result is a paradoxical situation, in which the causes of the reaction are in one domain of reality, while the effects and responses happen in another. This demands the emotional and intellectual achievement of keeping contradictory realities simultaneously in play (Schechner 2006). Goffman (1959, 1964) initially described theatrical performance to be a keying of a primary framework, as it is not real or actual. Interestingly, he later points out that the frame of aesthetic performance is "something less than a benign construction and something more than a simple keying" (Goffman 1974, p. 138), leaving it unclear as to what it could then be. He points out that from a performer's perspective the aesthetic performance *could* be seen as a keying, but that the presence of an audience complicates this.

Following Goffman's (1974) frame analysis, Gary Alan Fine (1983) conceptualised the effort of keeping various realities in play through the context of role-playing games. He presents this as the three "levels of consciousness": 1) the "primary framework", that is, the real world perceived through social performance, 2) the game context, that is, the rules, conventions, and constraints that govern performers' actions, and 3) the fantasy context, that is, the fictive reality created by the aesthetic media in question. Each level has its own structure of meaning and own culture. McAuley (2000) conceptualised the same structure in the context of theatre using more performance-based terminology. This "triple awareness", as he calls it, involves social reality, presentational reality, and fictional reality, which correspond to Fine's (1983) three levels accordingly. McAuley (2000) elaborates that the fictional reality exists at the mercy of the social and presentational realities, both of which are based on their own sets of contextualised norms. Objects and spaces are both real and not real, existing simultaneously in actual space, performed space, and fictional space (McAuley 2000).

Overall, it becomes apparent that aesthetic performance emerges and is understood through three contexts: social performance that is perceived as real, performance that is enacted in the aesthetic context, and fictional performance

that is created in the process. All three levels form separate identities, involve their own interaction and norms, as well as result in their own reality and space (Fine 1983; McAuley 2000; Schechner 2006). Aesthetic performance then seems to involve many more tensions than social performance, as people, things, and spaces can perform on different levels while interacting. There are various perspectives as to how aesthetic performances are experienced, how they take place, how they should be structured, and what kinds of forms make up their typology. I discuss these in detail in the rest of this chapter.

4.4.4 Stanislavski's Typology of Theatre Performance

Contemporary theatre performance in the Western world has its origins in the general typology presented by Konstantin Stanislavski (1953, 1989) and most notably developed by Vsevolod Meyerhold (1968), Evgenii Vahtangov (1984), Lee Strasberg (1987), and Bertold Brecht (1965). According to Stanislavski (1953, 1989) the typology takes form in the art of *perezhivanie* and art of *predstavlenie*. A similar typology was later presented by Brecht (1965) as *dramatic* and *epic* theatre, and more recently discussed by Richard Schechner (2006) as *realistic* and *Brechtian* theatre. It is important to note that Stanislavski himself originally spoke of art and aesthetic experience, rather than the more limited theatrical performance. This allows me to link his work better to aesthetic performance in exploring the performance of fantasy.

The above typologies roughly follow Aristotelian and Platonic philosophy. As Pitches (2007b) notes, the aesthetic performance of today follows neither the ideas of Aristotle or Plato, but in many ways contradicts and combines their work. Moreover, Aristotle and Plato are often polarised, which is a misconception. Nevertheless a great deal of aesthetic theory and practice does *build on* and *reinterpret* their ideas. It then makes sense to talk of Aristote*lian* and Plato*nic* theatre performance, which stem from Aristotle's and Plato's philosophy of mimesis.

Perezhivanie has been the dominant form of performance in the contemporary Western world (Carnicke 1998; McAuley 2000; Schechner 2006). It was created on the basis of the ideas of the Enlightenment, yet was heavily influenced by Fordism and Taylorism, as well as Newtonian mechanics (Carnicke 1998; Pitches 2006). The approach is modelled on everyday life, with the actor disappearing into the role (Stanislavski 1953, 1989; Schechner 2006). Stanislavski himself links his work to Aristotle. Aristotelian aesthetic performance is focused on emotion, creating a logical and ordered world, and seeking truth through the senses. Such performance is rooted in the real world and based on observation and perception (Pitches 2007b). *Perezhivanie* theatre is usually based on some sort of referent or source, such as a text, a script, a ritual, or a story, and heavily relies on the materials it is based on. This is because the aim is to provide perfect representation of the base materials (Lewis 2007), moving the performance from fantasy toward reality (Stanislavski 1953). The aim is to engage the audience's emotions, that is, to create catharsis (Pitches 2007a). As Schechner (2006) proposed, this results in a very realist school of thought.

Predstavlenie, on the other hand, emphasises processes and their physical aspects (Stanislavski 1953; Schechner 2006). This approach has its roots in industrialism, constructivism, Taylorism, Behaviouralism, as well as biomechanics (Pitches 2006). Here, the actor does not disappear into the role, but rather engages with it (Stanislavski 1953; Schechner 2006). Such theatre does not follow Plato, as he was against mimetic arts. Plato believed these to harbour lies and immoral behaviour, as well as engage the sympathies of the audience to make them passive (Pitches 2006). Consequently, Brecht described his approach to theatre, which closely aligns with *predstavlenie*, as non-Aristotelian. Nevertheless, clear links to Plato can be seen as underlying the theatre of *predstavlenie,* with the approach building on Plato's ideas rather than trying to align with them. The performance focuses on reason and approaches emotions with suspicion. Moreover, the material world is seen to be ignorant and illusive because real forms can only be found on a metaphysical level (Pitches 2006, 2007a), thus moving the performance from reality toward fantasy (Stanislavski 1953). The actor is critical of their self as well as the material they are using for the basis of the aesthetic performance, and the performance is dialogic rather than cathartic in their relationship to the audience (Pitches 2007a). As a result, the actual doing and the performance become more important than adhering to a plot or narrative (Lewis 2007).

Stanislavski's typology has created a backbone for Western theatre performance through its intrinsic ties to cultural, political, and scientific thought (Pitches 2006). Both types continue to be appropriated and reinvented to this day, resulting in the development of various approaches. Moreover, I feel that using Stanislavski's typology is appropriate for this particular research, as the context stems from a similar cultural background. I discuss the typology in more detail below.

4.4.4.1 Iskusstvo Perezhivaniya

Stanislavski (1953) was driven to create his famous System of acting by the poor state of the dominant form of aesthetic performance at the beginning of the 19th century, which he called *remeslo* (ремесло). *Remeslo* (which is Russian for craft or trade) consists of ready-made characters and practices, which are mimicked without feeling or understanding. Such copying of archetypes has no spirit or connection to life, as it does not search for truth. It only enslaves its audience through entertainment, which presents dominant beliefs of a life through mechanical and superficial meaning. *Remeslo's* production is fast and efficient, but creates a robot-like performance with little prospect of development or reflection on life (Stanislavski 1953). Such performance is spectacular and entertaining, but loses its representational power (Lin 2012). Badiou (1990) called such theatre "bad theatre", as it reassures roles, substance, and reality. It lacks nothing because it abolishes chance and establishes meaning. It creates a fulfilling and "easy" experience for the spectators, as they are not expected to be active or be surprised, but rather just take in the dispositions that they are given (Badiou 1990). *Remeslo* reflects in many ways Schechner's (1982) idea of the lack of performance knowledge in our society.

Inspired by a need to develop aesthetic performances away from the form of passive meaningless entertainment, Stanislavski proposed and put to use his System, which promoted *iskusstvo perezhivaniya* (искусство переживания, literally the art of experiencing and feeling, Stanislavski 1953), or *dramatic* theatre as Bertold Brecht (1965) called it. *Perezhivanie* has been roughly translated as a theatre of experiencing (e.g. Carnicke 1998; Pitches 2006), but is actually a much more elaborate concept, referring not only to experiencing, but feeling, worrying about, and living through experience (my translation). The aim of this type of performance is to create a world, which is not reality nor its reflection or representation, but a fantasy context that is real and alive to the individuals perceiving it in that time and space. The performance is thus successful from the point of view of this approach if both actors and spectators believe in it, reacting with real feeling and emotion (Stanislavksi 1953).

Stanislavski draws heavily on Ribot and Aristotle, although not using the latter directly, but rather rediscovering his work (Pitches 2006). Similar to Aristotle's logic, Stanislavski seeks a sense of order, emotional empathy, as well as focus on the characters and their actions (Pitches 2006, 2007b). Moreover, Newton's and Taylor's ideas can be seen resonating in Stanislavski's work as the supertask, which is the through-line of drama and thus also its motivation (Pitches 2006).

To create experiences that are alive, this type of performance is logical and finalised, and also uses elements of real life (Stanislavski 1990). Actors are placed within a well-planned, detailed atmosphere of performance. The performance is based in realism and naturalism; it involves being true to the given character and having full belief in the context (Stanislavski 1989, 1953). The performance is not imitation, but existence, into which the "real" self is extended through recombining memories and emotions as well as fitting them into the context. *Perezhivanie* does not entail playing one's self, but rather creating a doubleness of self: the self in the new context and the self as a reflexive spectator (Stanislavski 1953). However, it is important to note that Stanislavski does not imply by this a doubleness of awareness.

In *perezhivanie* theatre*,* the inner world and emotions of the individual are the starting point and the material that is to be developed in the performance. The direction of performance is outward: from inner to outer, from mind to body, from fantasy to reality. The idea is that through belief in emotion and fantasy, which are bound to the mind, we can also create action and reality. Simply put, fantasy is made alive and real (Stanislavski 1953, 1989, 1991; Chekhov 1995).

Emotion is difficult to control, as, from the perspective of the rational *perezhivanie,* it is irrational as well as dependent on context and experience. Yet, it is the experience of emotion that creates belief in the fantasy world and the truth found within it. The System thus calls for a balance of cognition and emotion. Cognition, which is under constant control, is used to uncover and frame elements and processes that are normally unconscious (Stanislavski 1953). The subconscious becomes a tool and an ally of the conscious, bringing individuals out of the stupor created by entertainment (Carnicke 1998). The process is supported by a clear plotline, the goal of which is to emerge in the collaboration of the conscious

and unconscious, bringing together the various bits of the performance into a whole (Stanislavski 1953).

The real life and emotion created by performers is infectious to its witnesses (Stanislavski 1953). The audience is no longer passive, but becomes involved emotionally and cognitively through empathy and reflection, as it is swept away into a new reality. While *perezhivanie* requires full belief from its viewers, it remains separate from them behind the so-called "fourth wall", that is, an imaginary wall between actors and spectators (Stanislavski 1953, 1989, 1990). The performers and spectators come close through shared concerns: emotional experiences are created on both sides of the fourth wall, showing the unconscious and extending the horizon of understanding. However, performers and spectators cannot be united, as their difference is never eradicated or forgotten. The performers exist in their own world, into which spectators are only allowed as unacknowledged observers (Stanislavski 1953).

Critique of the System and its focus on the theatre of *perezhivanie* has mostly come from proponents of the theatre of *predstavlenie*. Most notably, Bertold Brecht (1965, 2000) and Vsevolod Meyerhold (1968) argued that *dramatic* theatre makes people passive and fails to teach them anything, as it only creates mimicry and illusion, into which both performer and spectator are placed. Both groups come back to real life unchanged and with no developed knowledge of their lives or the world (Brecht 1965). *Perezhivanie,* from the perspective of critics, is too psychological and aesthetic. It is only pseudo-active, as it creates emotions and empathy that link to memories, but does not transfer experience or create a need for action (Brecht 2000). Consequently, the performance can easily become hallucinatory or fake, resulting in the loss of contact of the performer with the spectator and the real world. The immersion into illusion merely reignites and continuously feeds the discontent with reality (Brecht 1965). Moreover, the created world is self-evident and fully explained: ideals are shown and desires are created, but the process of attaining them is left unaccounted for (Brecht 1965, 2000; Leach 2004). As a result, the performance becomes either limited to an individual's own experiences or results in the eradication of the self completely (Meyerhold 1968; Brecht 2000). *Perezhivanie* extends passiveness by clinging onto the individualism of modernity in which it was created (Meyerhold 1968).

4.4.4.2 Iskusstvo Predstavleniya

As a parallel reaction to *remeslo* theatre, Vsevolod Meyerhold (1968) and later Bertold Brecht (1965) developed a different approach to performance: biomechanics and *epic* theatre, accordingly. The latter has become well-known as *Brechtian* theatre (Schechner 2006). These approaches combined popular theatre forms to the theories of industry fashionable in that period, including Taylorism, Behaviouralism, and biomechanics (Pitches 2006, 2007b). While the two are separate schools of performance, they share their underlying philosophy and aim. Most importantly, for the purpose of my research, the two similarly approach the relationship of art and reality as well as the individual's relationship to the perceived other world. Zazzali (2008) has similarly argued that Brecht and Meyerhold

"shared striking artistic, personal, and professional similarities" (p. 293). Consequently, I group the two together.

Predstavlenie, can be harshly translated as spectacle, but also means imagination, presentation, dramatics, ideas, and impression (my translation). Brecht does not actually use the term *iskusstvo predstavleniya* (искусство представления), but it is clear that Stanislavski referred to this school of thought when describing the type of performance in his typology. Moreover, Vahtangov (1984) and Chekhov (1995) describe this type of theatre as *predstavlenie*, and Meyerhold (1968) describes his work to be in line with it. Consequently, I use this term in order to sustain conceptual clarity by adhering to Stanislavski's typology. I nevertheless forgo the term's negative connotation originally given to it by its inventor.

Brecht (1965) argued that *dramatic* theatre (i.e. *perezhivanie*) merely creates images of life that envelop the individual completely, while *epic* theatre (i.e. *predstavlenie*) results in an intensity, through which people actually experience and contemplate reality (Brecht 1965). *Predstavlenie* does not aim to copy life or create another world, but to create experience of something utterly different through activating both actor and spectator. Meyerhold (1968) adds that our perception of reality lacks clarity and a holistic view of all its elements, and thus emulating such a structure accomplishes nothing.

The impulse of this type of theatre is to move away from naturalism and realism, rather aiming to create performances that are shocking and do not provide any meaning directly. Performance is based on cognition, well-specified physical movement, form, and technique (Brecht 1965; Meyerhold 1968). As Chekhov (1995) puts it, it starts with a clear frame in an ambiguous context, with the details emerging later on. The aim is still to separate from reality, but by awakening fantasy rather than being placed into it. The focus is on becoming aware of, acknowledging, and taking a step back from the performance's illusion in order to allow change, manipulation, and development (Brecht 1965; Vahtangov 1984). This allows both spectators and performers to come together, confront the context of the performance, and learn something new about the world through created action and dialogue (Brecht 1965; Meyerhold 1968).

In practice, *predstavlenie* breaks the elements of life down into actions without building them up into a whole. The performance emerges as a montage of different elements and processes, the meaning of which has to be constructed and filled by actors and spectators. By forcing individuals to reach for the unknown rather than showing them something, the real is extended and improved, but never becomes illusionary (Meyerhold 1968; Brecht 2000; Vahtangov 1984). Through becoming conscious of and stepping out of both aesthetic and social structures, the spectators gain a new perspective and start searching for explanations, motives, and modes of action (Meyerhold 1968; Brecht 2000). Moreover, the performance tries to shock and alienate the audience by calling on less appealing preconditions of life, as well as making everyday elements different, unexpected, and thus the object of cognitive contemplation. As a result, the performance breaks conventions and leaves many things open (Brecht 1965; Meyerhold 1968; Jameson 2005; Pitches 2006).

The focus of the approach is on the physical, the rational, and the external, as the body is believed to be more in control than the mind (Brecht 1965; Meyerhold 1968). The performance moves from reality and physical action towards making it something different and fantastic (Brecht 1965; Vahtangov 1984; Pitches 2006). Emotion and cognition are not blocked, but are seen as a side-product filled in by each individual on their own and through the created dialogue, rather than being the main takeaway of performance (Meyerhold 1968; Brecht 1965; Vahtangov 1984; Pitches 2006). According to this approach, empathy cannot teach us anything, and *predstavlenie* thus tries to help individuals understand how life works by forcing them to figure out for themselves how things could be changed or developed (Brecht 1965).

An individual does not hide, transform, or extend their self, but creates a duality of the self and the character as standing next to and communicating with one another (Brecht 1965). What is performed is the communication between performer and their various selves, accentuating the difference between them. This brings about a detached, ironic, and almost painful self-awareness both cognitively and physically (Meyerhold 1968). The aim of the performer is not to make others empathise, but to create a stimulus for people to react to in order to open up new ideas, to influence people's lives, and to teach them new things about themselves and the surrounding world (Brecht 1965; Meyerhold 1968).

The performance arouses activity, demands an attitude, and compels the audience to make decisions (Meyerhold 1968; Leach 1989; Brecht 2000). The performance becomes a way of communicating *with* people, not *to* them, as the "fourth wall" is broken down (Stanislavski 1953; Brecht 1965; Meyerhold 1968 Lin 2012). Spectators and performers become equal and co-creating parties, filling in gaps created by the performance with their interaction (Meyerhold 1968). Meaning is not given, but left open, to be created during the performance as a shared and social process rather than a personal and individual characteristic (Meyerhold 1968; Leach 1989; Brecht 2000).

According to Badiou (1990), such theatre of dismal pedagogy is "good theatre", as, instead of summoning spectators to an experience of pleasure, it causes them to think. Good theatre does not represent, but demonstrates. It demands that spectators give active, critical, and almost painful attention to the performance. Spectators are required to attach the development of the meaning to the performance, thus turning them into the interpreters of the interpretation.

Critique of the approach has mostly come from supporters of a *dramatic* or *perezhivanie* type of performance, namely Konstantin Stanislavski. He rebuked the approach to be truth*like*, not truth*ful* through its harsh non-idealised themes, as well as the lack of belief and explanation (Carnicke 1998). The performance creates its own reality instead of reflecting our own, which can easily lead to alteration of truth and complete disconnection from quotidian life (Stanislavski 1988; Carnicke 1998). The performers and what they portray are disconnected, ripping apart the indivisible body and soul. *Predstavlenie* is effective, but not long-lasting, because it does not create belief or human spirit. It surprises the audience, but remains pompous and shallow, unable to show or interpret subtle emotions (Stanislavski 1953). McConachie (2008) points out that *predstavlenie* dismisses

emotion completely, which results in the elimination of a central part of the experience. Brecht feared that empathy turns an audience passive, but emotion and empathy are necessary to sustain rationality and attention during theatre performance (McConachie 2008).

4.4.4.3 Balanced Theatre

The approaches of *perezhivanie* and *predstavlenie* started out as different responses to the same problem, and, with their development, came to overlap in many ways (Vahtangov 1984). With time, proponents of *perezhivanie* noticed a need for more physical and material elements (e.g., Stanislavski 1953, 1991; Chekhov 1995). Despite his harsh critique, Stanislavski turned towards a more physical type of theatre in his late work, as he realised that the focus on the mind alone neglects the important role of the body (Brecht 1965; Carnicke 1998). Advocates of *predstavlenie* also became aware of the gap that a lack of emotion, cognition, and a holistic perspective create (e.g. Brecht 1965; McConachie 2008). Because of their shared historical roots and context of development, the different types of performance work better in unity and balance (Meyerhold 1968), creating a continuum from *perezhivanie* to *predstavlenie*. In fact, Richard Schechner (2006) has proposed that "Brechtian" performance works as a supplement rather than a substitute to realistic acting.

Alone, the two sides of Stanislavski's typology are unimportant and become stunted, says Vahtangov (1984). Together, the approaches create a cognitive horizon that incorporates performers and spectators into what is viewed, yet allows them to be critical. People need play, but also to remember that they are playing (Vahtangov 1984). Performance should thus focus on both questions and possible answers (Barba 1995), both the how and the what (Vahtangov 1984).

4.4.5 Other Developments

Stanislavski's System has been developed and extended by many artists into various streams and directions of theatre performance (Pitches 2006). I discuss some of the most significant and central developments below.

4.4.5.1 Chekhov

Mikhail Chekhov developed *perezhivanie* into a stream of romanticised and idealised performance, relying heavily on Stanislavski's work and combining it with Rudolf Steiner's. Chekhov pushes away from the naturalism, materialism, emotional introspection, and psychology dominating Stanislavski's work, bringing back romanticism by focusing on spiritual and moral values, as well as the soul rather than materiality. In this approach, the actor has moral responsibility for the spectators and their souls, and the spectators become a part of the performance (Pitches 2006).

While most people have written off Chekhov as being Aristotelian, Pitches (2007b, 2013) points out that he is actually Platonic. Chekhov's work is strongly based on his reading of Steiner, who heavily used Plato's work. However, Chekhov does not base his idea of performance in dispassionate reason, but rather focuses on the idea of imagination (Chekhov 1995; Pitches 2007b). Chekhov believed imagination to be the basis for all performance, as it has the ability to fulfil desires (Chekhov 1995). Pitches (2013) agrees that there is a difference in the starting point, but stresses that the underlying ideology and goal in nevertheless Platonic. Chekhov promotes distance to emotions and a continuous doubleness of consciousness (Pitches 2006). Actors embody, internalise, and individualise the characters' main drive, which takes an ideal archetypal form and is based on higher levels of abstraction (Pitches 2007b).

Chekhov's performance always starts with imagination and the inner life of an individual, extending it into the body and actuality (Chekhov 1995; Pitches 2006). The aim of the performance is to transport performers and spectators into a fantasy world with the help of imagination. Following Stanislavski's late work, Chekhov incorporates increasingly more physical elements into performance, bringing it closer to *predstavelnie* in many ways, yet keeping it in balance with emotional elements. The focus of Chekhov's work nevertheless remained on the inner world of the individual, transformation of the performer, and the creation of a whole out of all the elements of the performance (Chekhov 1995). Chekhov further notes that performance can and should acknowledge its connection to everyday life, as well as strive to go beyond its limits. This, Chekhov (1995, 1999) believed, would allow all the knowledge and experience accumulated in fantasy to be used also in everyday life.

Chekhov's work differs from Stanislavski's in many notable ways. Chekhov did not focus on emotions from memory as Stanislavski had done, as he believed these could be too personal and cause harm. He believed emotion to be born in the sensations arising from activity of performance (Chekhov 1995). Moreover, according to Chekhov, the experience of theatre performance should not involve full immersion into character, as this would result in hallucination (Vahtangov 1984; Chekhov 1995), but should rather entail a dual consciousness of self and actor. The actor needs to embrace both the psyche and, through it, the embodied behaviour of the character, but does not need to be true to them as Stanislavski suggested.

Most notably Mikhail Chekhov (1995) worked on developing Stanislavski's notion of the individual's self that is placed in the performance. Chekhov believed that the self exists on three levels during a theatre performance: the self, the character, and the ideal self, which is in control of the other selves (Agnew 1986; Chekhov 1995). An ideal self creates the character by looking at the self from the outside and building up the character self through various emotional experiences (Chekhov 1995).

4.4.5.2 Strasberg

Stanislavski's System of *perezhivanie* was reinterpreted by Lee Strasberg (1987) into the Method, which reflected a focus on Freudism (Carnicke 1998). This highly psychoanalytic Method focuses on the mind and its logical, efficient representation through verbal methods. As a result, action is eradicated and emotion is merely added on. Experiencing as a central part of the System went unnoticed by Strasberg, as experiencing is too reflexive and full of imagination, and could thus break the Method actor's instinctive response (Strasberg 1987; Carnicke 1998). In contradiction to Stanislavski, Strasberg's focus turned to direct use and modification of personal memory, which can be quite traumatic to the performer. The performance became a reliable technique of codified and simplified affective memory, never mixing cognition with emotion. Instead of extending the self, the Method requires the performer and the character to melt together. Stanislavski's search for truth in an individual's soul was replaced by a rational mind with a subconscious that is a foe to be overcome. The holistic performance became a disconnected account of inner life (Carnicke 1998).

While Stanislavski continued to develop his ideas towards a balance of fantasy and real life with more focus on action, Strasberg kept to the earlier version of the System that created illusion through a focus on cognition (Strasberg 1987; Stanislavski 1991). Stanislavski's latter ideas were not commercially viable for the business-oriented Method (Carnicke 1998). Supported by the development of media and entertainment that created a passive spectator separate from the performance (Agnew 1986; Auslander 2008), Strasberg's approach focused on spoken word and forgot the role of the body (Carnicke 1998). To maximise profitability, aesthetic performance with a Method approach developed in non-live media, where the director has power, and contact is made with a camera rather than a human audience. Scenes are edited, recombined, and refined with special effects, creating a performance that never took place (Carnicke 1998). Performance thus returned to elements of *remeslo* that has a passive and non-responsive audience.

4.4.5.3 Grotowski

In line with Meyerhold's (1968) and Brecht's (1965, 2000) approaches, Jerzy Grotowski (1968) developed his theatre of *poverty*, which aims to dispose of any superfluous elements that popular media such as TV and film are beset with. The approach holds that truth cannot be found on a universal level, and all we can strive for is a *total act*, that is, acting sincerely and unveiling the self without holding back. This allows us to exist in and respond to aesthetic performance.

Performers use personal associations, but not memories, creating pure consciousness that the spectator can encounter. The result is a tension between, but also a lack of difference among actor and audience (Grotowski 1968). McAuley (2000) notes that, as this type performance tries to induce the spectator to be more involved and reflexive, it encounters the possibility of erasing the character self from the equation altogether. Consequently, the performed self can become indistinguishable and a permanent part of the performer (McAuley 2000). The performance thus runs the danger of breaking down the reflexive and conscious

structure of aesthetic performance, obliterating its function by making it equal to social performance.

4.4.5.4 Artaud

Grotowski's (1968) approach was closely intertwined with Antonin Artaud's (1974) theatre of *cruelty,* which refers to performance that shatters illusion and presents the audience with truth they do not want to see. Artaud (1971, 1974) believed that our media-driven culture renders people unaccustomed to the direct action that aesthetic performance must have, as individuals are only faced with filtered projected images that no longer connect with sensibility. The theatre of *cruelty* thus aims to combat this intellectual stupor through phenomenological performance that reaches the spiritual through the physical. The action of performance is found between thought and gesture, realising experience without its possible real life consequences. The *cruelty* is in the disillusioning restoration of life to aesthetic performance in order for the latter to regain its function as a mirror of our everyday lives (Artaud 1974, 1989).

4.4.5.5 Postmodern Theatre

Meyerhold's (1968) *predstavlenie* and Brecht's (1965, 2000) *epic theatre* created a stream of theatre focusing on mechanics, physical elements, and the eradication of the illusion of aesthetic performance. In Brecht's (1965, 2000) late work, *epic* theatre had already begun to transform into a dialectic theatre. This approach became the basis for the so-called postmodern performance, which tries to erase the divide between audience and performance, as well as real and aesthetic experiences (Grotowski 1968; Auslander 1992). Such performance challenges well-known norms and structures through the use of multiplex signals. It also desperately tries to evade the retention typical of contemporary photogenic media, such as television and film (Schechner 1982). Postmodern performance is very critical in its nature and is directly tied into political and social issues relevant to its cultural context (Grotowski 1968; Jansson 2002; Auslander 1992, 2008).

The more contemporary postmodern performance seems to take many of the above-mentioned notions even further (Auslander 1992). Artaud's (1974) theatre of cruelty presented individuals with the opportunity to make aesthetic performance closer to reality and thus experiment without getting hurt. In contrast, postmodern elaborations of such performance try to incorporate pain that is real and actual. The aim is to make social and aesthetic performances equal (Auslander 1992). However, it is important to note that if clearly contextualised as aesthetic, the performance is made no more real if the pain is made real.

Postmodern performance deconstructs ideological underpinnings, rejects illusion and representation, and escapes the imprint of authors and actors. However, it does not present any alternative idea. The context of postmodern performances becomes removed from its practices and forms within a culture of fragmented meaning. Consequently, we can no longer step out of any illusion or structure through the performance (Auslander 1992). By making social and aesthetic performance equal to one another, the role of the latter is eradicated. Auslander

(1992) suggests that, at most, postmodern performance acts as a guide to the confusing and fragmented consumer culture, which the performance reflects without mimicking or participating in it. As the context becomes untouchable, performance turns to rationally deconstructing and exploring the inner world of the individual (Auslander 1992).

5 LIVE ACTION ROLE-PLAYING GAMES AS RESEARCH CONTEXT

Fantasy is very subjective in its nature (Armitt 1996; Grayson and Martinec 2004). Its performance cannot be recorded and its recollection does not represent it (Fine 1983). In order to gain a subjective and embodied understanding of fantasy performance, I studied the context of live action role-playing games (LARP) in the cultural context of Finland. This allowed me access to experiences of fantasy that are felt to be concrete and tangible.

LARP is "a form of role-play where the participants take on fictive personalities and act out their interaction in a predefined, fictive setting" (Bøkman 2003, p. 177). The form differs from other types of role-playing games (RPG) in that the players act out interaction physically (Bøkman 2003; Bowman 2010). LARP often involves elaborate costuming and moving around in a designated game space (Bowman 2010), which is traditionally set in themes of fantasy or science fiction (Mackay 2001; Bøkman 2003). All in all, LARP can be defined as face-to-face games that allow their players to assume the roles of fantasy characters and operate with some degree of freedom in fantasy environments within actual time and space.

As I have shown earlier, play is a central form of performance of fantasy, and games are the structured and controlled forms of play. LARP gives access to individuals' interaction with and negotiation of fantasy elements in the creation of bodily, shared, and almost tangible fantasy environments, thus supporting the aims of this research. Exploring this context further provides unique insight into how culture is constructed and transformed, how social systems operate, as well as how meanings or norms are used and negotiated (following Fine 1983).

5.1 Role-Playing Games as a Research Context

RPG in general is a relatively new human activity and representation of fantasy (Fine 1983), which Mackay (2001) defines as an "episodic and participatory story creation system that includes a set of […] rules that assist a group of players and a gamemaster in determining how their fictional characters' spontaneous interactions are resolved" (p. 5). RPG developed from war and simulation games and was

influenced by popular culture themes found in books, comics, films, TV shows, and video games (Mackay 2001). The starting point of contemporary RPG is ambiguous and contested, but its foundation stone is considered to be the *Dungeons and Dragons* tabletop role-playing game published in 1974, which was heavily influenced by the growing popularity of the fantasy genre within popular culture at the time. The increasing success of fantasy and science fiction has been explained by modernisation, industrialisation, and the sociopolitical climate of the 1970's, which created a need for security and clarity within people. The fantasy genre provided a world with clear-cut good and evil as well as the security of structures and rationality (Fine 1983; Mackay 2001; Bowman 2010). RPG became the perfect vehicle for such characteristics, as it allows strict rationality and the creation of complex rules (Saler 2012).

RPG started in the now traditional tabletop games, developing into live-action performances, and, with technological advancements, also into virtual and online versions of role-playing (Bowman 2010). In the contemporary context, RPG is thus seen more as an umbrella term for a large variety of game types, including board games, video games, live-action games, and massive multi-player online games (Mackay 2001; Waskul 2006). While various forms of RPG have developed from one another, they function in different ways because of their individual characteristics.

RPG as an academic research context has received most interest in the fields of game studies (e.g., Williams, Hendricks, and Winkler 2006; Montola, Stenros, and Waern 2009) and information sciences (e.g., Harviainen 2013; Montola 2012), as well as some interest in sociology (e.g. Fine 1983; Waskul and Lust 2004; Waskul 2006) and performance studies (e.g. Mackay 2001; Cramer 2010). Within consumer research, the context of role-playing games has mostly been studied through online and video games with the goal of exploring online consumption (e.g., Starbuck and Webster 1991; Molesworth 2006; Molesworth and Denegri-Knott 2008; Denegri-Knott and Molesworth 2010) and the psychological effects of virtual gaming (e.g., Chuang 2006; Kuss and Griffiths 2012a, 2012b). Face-to-face RPG contexts have been represented in Kinkade and Katovich's (2008) study of cooperation and Martin's (2004) research of evoking imagery, both using the card game "Magic: The Gathering" as their setting. A few studies have also used historical re-enactment as their research contexts. Belk and Costa (1998) explored the consumption of fantasy through ethnography of fur trade rendezvous re-enactment in Rocky Mountain American West. In a similar context of American Civil War re-enactment, Chronis, Arnould, and Hampton (2012) studied the role of imagination, concluding that the phenomenon is a negotiated social process.

RPG has often been studied as one large phenomenon, disregarding the fact that its various subcategories are very different (Mackay 2001). However, it is important to differentiate LARP from other similar practices, as they have varying forms, focuses, and outcomes. For instance, online gaming differs significantly in the way individuals engage with the fantasy worlds and interact with one another, because the practice is not spatially bound, does not involve face-to-face interaction, and relies on technology. Tabletop RPGs tend to be much more rule-bound, and less bodily and prop oriented than LARP. Lastly, historical re-enactment tends

to be much more scripted than LARP, rarely involves taking on a character, and is very strict about historical accuracy and authenticity of costumes and props.

Existing research in the context of RPG has mostly concentrated on describing gaming, community, and lifestyle, as well as on investigating themes of identity creation and negotiation (e.g. Mackay 2001; Martin 2004; Williams, Hendricks, and Winkler 2006; Bowman 2010). Hence, there is an understanding of the structure of the game as well as the self within it, but the dynamics of the social setting as well as its connection to everyday life remain understudied. These themes are nevertheless central to understanding how fantasy works and is organised within the boundaries of RPG, offering insight into how the more general social world functions, negotiates norms and constraints, as well as distributes power (Fine 1983; Williams, Hendricks, and Winkler 2006).

5.2 The Context of LARP

LARP provides an interesting point of view to the study of fantasy experiences as a part of everyday life, as it puts into action human performance, which is normally very personal, individual, and subjective. LARPs are not quantified in the same ways as most other RPG games are, and do not follow rigid rules. For instance, tabletop RPGs use dice and game boards, which often results in more strategic play than an exercise of fantasy. Virtual and online RPGs, on the other hand, use computer platforms and tend to become trapped by the pre-set limitations of cyberspace and software. LARPs are played out in actual time and space with a group of people, and generally provide players only with a very vague background and goals. It is important to note that while LARP is quite free in its form, it does involve some rules. Rules or conventions are necessary for the players to feel safe and for the game not to be haphazard (Fine 1983; Mackay 2001; Waskul 2006).

LARP as an object of study in itself has been the focus of some research (see e.g., Copier 2005; Williams, Hendricks, and Winkler 2006; Montola, Stenros, and Waern 2009; Knutepunkt companion books). This literature tends to focus on LARP as an activity, exploring and developing its mechanics, forms, and experiences. While I acknowledge this literature and use some of it to support my research, I want to stress that my aim is not to extend this area of research. I use LARP as a context to study the concept and performance of fantasy, not as an object of study or theorising in itself.

LARPing varies considerably in different parts of the world. For instance, in the Baltics and Russia, LARPs are traditionally very war and strategy oriented. LARPs in many areas of the US tend to focus on battles or building experience points for their characters. Such LARPs reflect a history of tabletop role-playing games and video games, creating a competitive and rule-bounded context. Nordic countries promote LARPing that is more interactional- and relationship-oriented, exploring characters and situations. Such LARPs cannot be won, as they are aimed at exploring various experiences and emotions of human life.

LARPs in Finland predominantly focus on the emotional and intersubjective lives of the characters, as well as the fictive world that they live in, allowing

LARPers to physically enter a world of fantasy. LARPs are not competitive and cannot be won, but their goal is rather to create an experience for the players. LARPs vary a great deal in their themes, including futuristic, medieval, historical, realistic, and surreal games, to name a few. LARPs usually involve contexts, plotlines, and characters that are based on popular culture and are thus very familiar to participants, who tend to be very knowledgeable of the so-called "geek culture". Media is used both directly (e.g. *Harry Potter* or *Lord of the Rings* LARPs) or through mixing elements (e.g. vampire LARPs). I describe a LARP performance in detail in Chapter 7.

Unlike LARP in some other countries, LARP in Finland does not generally revolve around clubs or organisations. There are a number of LARP groups, but these are more focused on providing financial and organisational support for creating LARP events. No membership is necessary to attend LARPs, and people tend to participate in events according to their own schedules and interests, with the group reforming in a fluid manner for each separate event. Finnish LARPers participate in various kinds games that are individually organised by different people all over the country. The fluid groups are vaguely divided into regions, which are more or less based on geographical closeness as well as interest in specific LARP themes, such as historical events or science fiction. The regions do have some differences in the way games are organised, but ultimately provide very similar experiences. All in all, LARPers tend to take part in games that differ in themes, size, and participants.

Researching RPG can be challenging, as the experience is very subjective and there are few ways of documenting the process: once a game is played, it is gone and nothing can fully represent it (Mackay 2001). Understanding cannot be reached by means of objective and rational observation, but requires participation in and an emotional connection to the subjective experience (Fine 1983; Schechner 1990). Consequently, participant ethnography is the ideal approach for exploring the context (Fine 1983). I describe my research methods in detail in the following chapter.

6 METHOD

The research was conducted through means of ethnography. The method was a perfect fit, as it supported the research questions, the theoretical perspective of performance theory, and the chosen research context of LARP, all of which called for an approach that is both embodied and cognitive, as well as allows subjective exploration of a cultural context. My approach answers Jansson's (2002) and Borer's (2010) call to engage in more empirical study of fantasy.

In this chapter, I first discuss ethnography as well as the application of performance theory to the method from a theoretical point of view. This is followed by my account of the data collection and analysis.

6.1 Ethnography

"Ethnography is the deep understanding of the lived experience of people as it unfolds in a particular cultural context, and the representation of that understanding in ways that are faithful to that experience" (Sherry 2008, pp. 86-7). The word ethnography is derived from the Greek word *ethos* meaning "folk, people, nation" and *grapho,* which means "I write" (Oxford Dictionary). Ethnography is thus both a form of data collection and a way of describing and interpreting culture (Geertz 1973; Arnould 1998; Sherry 2008); it is the fieldwork and its representation visually or textually (Moisander and Valtonen 2006).

Ethnography is a study of social phenomena in situ (Moisander and Valtonen 2006). The method originated in cultural anthropology, where the focus of the method was to explore small-scale foreign societies and understand the shared system of meanings of their culture (Goulding 2004). Early ethnographic work often studied the "other" culture from a scientific, outsider point of view (Geertz 1973).

With time, ethnographic methods became increasingly used for studying contexts that are more mundane and closer to home, such as lifestyles and subcultures. The method changed both geographically and theoretically, becoming more relevant for marketing and consumer research (Moisander and Valtonen 2006). The method's nature also became more subjective and interpretive (Stebbins 1997); particularistic and pluralistic rather than generalisable (Arnould 1998). This allows researchers to approach culture through experience, which is

not just cognitive, but also emotional, sensual, and embodied (Bruner 1986; Sherry 2008; Schechner 2006).

Ethnography is commonly used in contemporary consumer culture research, because the method allows the researcher to go beyond cognition and behaviour, and to explore consumption from a social and cultural point of view (Arnould 1998). The contexts of studies have included biker subcultures (Schouten and McAlexander 1995), historical re-enactments (Belk and Costa 1998; Chronis, Arnould, and Hampton 2013), river rafting (Arnould and Price 1993), gay subcultures (Kates 2002), and cattle trade shows (Peñaloza 2000, 2001) to name a few.

Arnould and Wallendorf (1994) summarise the four guiding features of ethnography. First, data collection is done in the natural settings of the studied culture (Arnould and Wallendorf 1994), as the aim of the method is to explain how culture is constructed through and constructs individuals' behaviour (Arnould 1998). Ethnography focuses on how individuals experience, receive, and express their culture, which requires the researcher to not only observe, but also engage and reflect (Bruner 1986). Ethnography depends on immersion in the context (Sherry 2008), as this allows the participants' voices to be heard (Boyle 1994) and the cultural patterns to arise (Arnould and Wallendorf 1994). Fieldwork is thus the hallmark of ethnography (Goulding 2004).

Second, ethnography involves long-term participant observation in the specific culture or subculture (Arnould and Wallendorf 1994). Ethnography is most importantly about what it means to be in the situation and the society (Bruner 1986), and how experiences and activities reflect meaning for individuals (Abrahams 1986; Arnould 1998). Long-term immersion provides the opportunity for spontaneous encounters and emerging insight within the chosen setting (Arnould and Wallendorf 1994). Understanding is privileged over explanation and generalisation, and insight becomes the reward of ethnography. The researcher becomes a part of the research field (Boyle 1994) and an instrument of research (Sherry 2008). Moreover, the data is not taken at face value, but is considered throughout a long and discursive process of interpretation, reasoning, and correspondence with related studies (Boyle 1994). The researcher combines the contextualised and subjective insider experience with the comparative and interpreted outsider perspective, that is, the emic and the etic, to provide a deeper understanding (Bruner 1986; Boyle 1994; Arnould and Wallendorf 1994; Denzin 2003, 2005).

Third, ethnography should aim to produce interpretations of behaviours that the individuals studied and the intended audience evaluate as credible (Lincoln and Guba 1985; Arnould and Wallendorf 1994). This evaluation can be reached among members of the specific context through prolonged engagement, debriefing of peers, member checks, and pluralistic interpretations of the data that embrace culture and its variation. The audience of the research, on the other hand, should evaluate ethnography through its credibility, transferability, dependability of measure, and confirmability (Lincoln and Guba 1985). Holt (1991) argued that such objective measurement of credibility undermines the subjectivism of ethnography, possibly displacing insights that could be gained from the context and constraining researchers when conducting the research. He continues that, in ethnography, meaning is created through the interaction of researcher and context,

resulting in endless numbers of realities, their expressions, and understandings. Holt (1991) presents an alternative way of judging interpretive research: through its insightfulness. Truth value cannot be found through interpretive research, but because of the researchers' shared context and socialisation, the interaction and interpretation presented most likely creates knowledge that is favoured in a similar way by most researchers. In this way, credibility and shared viewpoints can be created.

Fourth, ethnography involves the use multiple data collection methods (Arnould and Wallendorf 1994), which allow multiple perspectives on the behaviours and context that are being studied (Arnould and Wallendorf 1994; Goulding 2004). Typically, ethnography includes participant observation, interviews, archival analysis, trace analysis, videography, and projective tasking (Sherry 2008). The different points of view are embraced because each individual method tends to have setbacks and limitations that can be supplemented by others, thus creating a more holistic understanding of the context. For instance, participant observation does not provide direct access to the perceptions, values, beliefs, and internal states of the interviewees. This can be aided by the use of interviews, which bring insight to individuals' opinions and experiences as a part of their own understanding (Arnould and Wallendorf 1994).

Ethnography is time-consuming and requires tedious adjusting, re-organising, and contextualising in accordance with the research aims, theoretical background, and analysis (Schechner 2006). However, this is all worthwhile, as the approach provides diverse, reflective, and critical understanding of research phenomena as part of culturally contextualised constellations of behaviour. Ethnography accommodates different perspectives in research, providing in-depth insight into various consumption contexts over time and vivid exemplars of the layers of meaning that organise behavioural constellations.

6.2 A Focus on Performance

Ethnography is an ideal method to use for exploring performance, as the central focus of performance theory is behaviour and its performance in social contexts (Turner 1987; Conquergood 1991; Denzin 2003; Schechner 2006). The aim of research from this theoretical point of view is to map out how performances are recreated in specific contexts by their performers, how these performances support meanings and relationships, as well as what elements are added and omitted in their processes (Schechner 2006).

Ethnography in the context of performance theory stresses certain elements of the method. First, a performative point of view strongly supports the idea of embodiment in ethnography. Performance is an action-oriented perspective, and, as a result, doing and studying performance become almost indiscernible processes (Schechner 2006). Performance theory privileges the body as a sight of knowing, and stresses the idea of lived experience (Conquergood 1991, 2002). People are used to expressing themselves and receiving knowledge visually and sonically, but seeing can only be done at a distance, creating a difference between the seen

object and the process of seeing (Schechner 1988). Performance theory thus suggests recovering the balance of body and thought, the verbal and nonverbal, as well as emotion and cognition in ethnographic research (Conquergood 1991; Denzin 2003; Lin 2012). The researcher needs to live through thoughts, emotions, and volitions (Turner 1985), merging feeling, understanding, and knowing in the experience of ethnography (Conquergood 2002). However, the researcher still needs to filter these embodied experiences through the system of representations of the studied context. The ethnographer must move back and forth between the situations of lived experience and the representations of those experiences in order to allow the exposure and challenging of meaning (Denzin 2003).

Second, performance theory requires the ethnographer to take a perspective that is not only subjective, but involves engagement that goes beyond neutral (Carlson 2003; Schechner 2006). Any approach or position within performance theory cannot be neutral or unbiased, as people influence performance by entering and being a part of it. Entering an event changes it, as new meaning is negotiated and brought to life (Denzin 2003; Schechner 2006). Moreover, we can never know another's experience fully (Bruner 1986), but participating in and directly experiencing the field can bring us closer to understanding phenomena cognitively and emotionally (Turner 1985; Carlson 2003). Performance ethnography values involvement, intimacy, and surrendering oneself to experiences, as mere observation cannot be reflexive about individuals' knowledge of their own experience (Denzin 2003). Understanding is therefore seen to emerge through performing and engaging with the context as an active participant who co-performs and co-constructs the performance (Conquergood 1991, 2002; Denzin 2003). The researcher aims to map out performance by exploring contextual and subjective experience through both the behaviour of others and one's own experiences (Schechner 1988, 2000, 2006). The aim is to eliminate difference between the researcher and the researched, as well as the artist and the scholar (Bode 2010). The challenge is to become aware of one's own place in the context and in relation to others, taking steps to either maintain or change these (Schechner 2006). The result is a confessional reflexivity, which no longer makes a distinction between self and other, yet keeps enough distance to be critical (Conquergood 1991; Denzin 2003). This does not foster universal knowledge (Denzin 2003), but creates understanding that connects to, extends, and is a part of its context, thus *increasing* knowledge and social awareness (Conquergood 1991; Denzin 2003).

Third, performance theory stresses taking a critical stance toward the context (Schechner 1985; Denzin 2003), as critical analysis of experience and its meaning helps us understand the complexities and wonders of the cultural and social worlds of human beings (Kapferer 1986). Performances are full of flaws, impurities, and lapses from the ideal, which add to the meaning and give it character (Turner 1987). The aim of ethnography is to identify not only what is developed, but also what is forgotten or even excluded in the context (Suvin 1988). A performance perspective reflects on, criticises, and challenges taken-for-granted and repressed meaning by learning through doing (Schechner 1985; Denzin 2003). The aim is to create an awareness of the constructedness of human activity and the implication of this in social and cultural encodings (Conquergood 1991, 2002). As

a result, research is able to map out how performance affects meanings, identities, communities, and overall culture (Johnson 2003), and expose how these are shaped by power and ideology (Denzin 2003). Ethnography invites dialogue by reflecting on what it records, clarifying the researcher's own position within the context, and presenting possibilities of change or development (Denzin 2003).

Lastly, the perspective of performance theory emphasises the importance of interpretation and analysis of the non-human elements in ethnography. Ethnography with a focus on performance explores experiences that are embodied and situated in time, place, and history (Conquergood 1991; Denzin 2003). The temporal and spatial context becomes inseparable from performance, as the restored behaviour creates its site and its history (Denzin 2003, 2005). The research method of ethnography is, nevertheless, often used to focus only on individuals, dismissing the role that space, objects, institutions, discourses, and other similar elements have in a performative scene (Patton 1995; Lin 2012). All of these give meaning to, affect, structure, and contribute to the understanding of performance, making them central to research and analysis (Schechner 1988, 2000, 2006; Johnson 2003; Lin 2012).

6.3 Data Collection

I collected data in the context of LARP using the method of ethnography with a focus on performances. Data collection began in July 2012 and ended in December 2015, spanning over a period of 41 months. The process primarily took place in Southern Finland, which was supported by ethnography in other regions of Finland, USA, Norway, and Poland. Following the research questions of the study, the data collection aimed to 1) outline the performance of LARP, 2) explore how LARP is experienced by individuals, and 3) understand how experiences of LARP are a part of and influence individuals' everyday lives.

In order to gain a more holistic perspective on the phenomenon, the research incorporated multiple methods of data collection. Data collection consisted of participant observation, formal and informal interviews, photography, as well as the analysis of objects, spaces, and online materials. I discuss each of these in detail below.

6.3.1 Participant Observation

The main method of data collection in this research was participant observation. Over the period of 41 months, I attended 53 separate LARPs as an active participant of the events. Most of the LARPs I attended were held in Finland, predominantly in its Southern parts because this geographic context was easily accessible to me. I also attended two LARPs in the USA, three LARPs in Norway, and one in Poland to compare experiences and gain different perspectives on the context. In addition to the LARP event itself, each game involved an application process, a preparation process, as well as various workshops and player meets. As

LARPs often take place in secluded venues and differ in size, length, and themes, I collected data in different ethnographic sites, ranging from small club spaces to large camping sites.

My personal background and interest in the so-called "geek culture" supported my research in many ways, as its elements are a central part of LARP. The games are often based on or incorporate elements of popular culture and media, such as TV-shows, films, video games, and online phenomena. This is because LARPers, that is, the people organising and attending the LARPs, tend to be involved in such culture. Having a thorough understanding of "geek culture" gave me a clear advantage in LARPing, as I did not need to ponder or worry about the elements that were used to construct the games. Consequently, I was able to grasp practices quickly and understand performances at a faster pace.

I initially got into LARP through online searches for events in the area of Southern Finland. I found a website that aggregates LARP events all over Finland and applied to attend one of the games. After attending this first LARP, I gained contact with the community, which provided me with more information and access to upcoming events. The LARP community is extremely open to new members, actively helping them to learn LARP practices and have a good experience. However, while the LARP community is very open, it is also quite secluded: most events are only shared among LARPers that know one another through social media websites. The LARP community has no specific hierarchy among its members, but does require commitment and regular attendance at events for an individual to become recognised as a LARPer. The more LARPs I attended and the more people I met, the more games I was invited to.

Initially, I found it quite easy to keep a distance to the context because of my lack of familiarity with it. However, as I developed an understanding of LARP and how to act within it, it became important to guard against becoming too close to the context. Becoming too immersed can result in a lack of insight and critical conclusions, as the researcher cannot maintain a balanced scholarly perspective and may slip into a narrow and particular point of view (Arnould and Wallendorf 1994; Schouten and McAlexander 1995). Some of the precautions I used to keep over-involvement at bay were critical self-examination, continuous reflection in field notes, discussion of the data with peers, and negotiation of the various methods of data collection.

I aimed to obtain very varied experiences of LARP in order to gain a holistic understanding of its performance. Consequently, I attended LARPs of various themes, length (from 2 hours to 5 days), size (from 8 people to over 500 people), type of organisation (written by game masters or together with players), and the amount of materials (from 3 lines to over 50 pages). I also aimed to perform very different characters in LARPs and diverse roles in the events in order to explore the various perspectives one can take during the event. I have played characters of differing age, social class, gender, race, species, sexual orientation, intelligence, and emotions. The characters have differed in their dispositions, opinions, and perspectives on politics, romance, and other important issues of everyday life. I have mostly engaged in LARP with a full character, but I have also helped organise some events and attended as non-player characters (NPC), that is, characters that

take on the role of an extra, supporting others' experiences and helping in organisational aspects.

To support the participant observation in LARPs, I also attended a number of popular culture conventions, which included LARP in its programme. The conventions did not add much to the research in terms of insight, but attending these events allowed me to see LARP's position within the larger field of RPG as well as popular culture in general.

I wrote extensive field notes for each LARP and convention event that I attended. The notes for the former addressed the whole process, starting from the application process to the LARP and ending with post-LARP discussions. I was not able to take notes during the actual games, as they required me to perform the character and engage with the fantasy world. However, I remained reflexive throughout the process and wrote detailed accounts of my experiences after each LARP. I also often jotted down notes and ideas to keep up with the field notes, later extending them into longer texts. The field notes, the recollection of experiences and their writing was supported by other forms of data, such as photographs, objects, and materials.

The analysis began as soon as the first data was collected and continued throughout the research. As a result, I continuously reflected on my involvement, compared it to my previous experiences, and monitored my personal development in understanding the context.

6.3.2 Interviews

In order to support my own personal experiences of participating in LARP, to gain an understanding of other participants' experiences, and to make a comparison between them, I conducted informal and formal interviews with LARPers. The informal interviews involved short and long discussions with participants, usually at the LARP venue, immediately before or immediately after the game. These were not recorded, but their main themes and insights were written down as part of the field notes. The informal interviews mostly involved discussions of the LARPs that we were attending, how individuals were experiencing the event and their character, as well as how these compared to those of past and forthcoming LARPs.

Formal interviews were conducted with key interviewees to acquire a deeper understanding of other LARPers' experiences. They took the form of more private and undisturbed discussions of experiences of LARP, which allowed me to gain an understanding of interviewees' long-term engagement with LARP in the context of their overall lives. A total of 16 interviews were conducted with nine interviewees. Four interviewees were interviewed once, and five interviewees were interviewed multiple times. All interviews were preceded and followed up by informal interviews and written correspondence.

I met all the interviewees during LARPs and recruited them through informal interviews. The aim was to obtain varied experiences and perspectives on LARP. As a result, interviewees varied in their experience in, preferences for, and time

spent engaged with LARP. Moreover, the interviewees were representative of the demographics of LARPers in Southern Finland. They were Finns aged from 19 to 29 years; seven of them were women and two were men. The interviewees are listed in Table 1 with their pseudonyms.

The interviews were conducted throughout the study. They lasted from about 30 minutes to a little over three hours. The interviews were held in settings familiar and comfortable for the interviewees in order to make them feel at ease and secure, as such settings help interviewees recall and describe their experience more freely (Thompson, Locander, and Pollio 1989). As a result, most of the interviews were held in the interviewees' homes, and a few were held in local coffee shops. Three interviews were conducted over Skype because interviewees resided in or had moved to live in other cities.

The interviews were usually held after a LARP we had both attended and focused on the interviewee's experiences of this event as well as how it related to their lives and other experiences of LARP. In addition, I asked participants to describe their overall engagement with LARP and how they had initially started the hobby. I would also briefly talk about my own experience of LARP in order to develop our discussions and ascertain interviewees' opinions on the emerging themes of the research (following Moisander, Valtonen, and Hirsto 2009). When interviewing the same individual multiple times, I was able to compare their experiences as well as gain an understanding of their own development and changing relationship to the performance over a long period of time. All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim, transforming them into 314 double-spaced pages of text composed of the respondents' experiences and reflections.

Interviewee	Age	Experience in LARP
Rose	29	New to LARP
Wade	24	About 10 years
Dawn	23	A few years
May	22	About 10 years
Hope	19	New to LARP
Chase	29	3 years
Sue	22	A few years
Peg	26	Over 10 years
Dot	24	A few years

Table 1 List of interviewees

6.3.3 Photographs

I took photographs in order to visually record the people, spaces, and objects that I encountered during participant observation (following Hill 1991; Schouten and McAlexander 1995). The visual records mostly served as cues to help me relive experiences, remember details, and create more thorough field notes and analysis. I mostly took photographs at LARP venues before and after the actual LARP event, as the game itself requires full attention and the context often limits the personal objects one can carry around for its duration. Taking photographs or even carrying around a camera would often not fit the character or the context of the LARP (for instance, if the setting was a medieval village). Therefore, the photographs mostly captured the preparation and the dismantling of LARPs, their spaces, and their characters. The aim was to capture the ephemeral nature of the fantasy spaces and characters, as well as the unique ensemble of costumes, props, and decorations that came together for a particular LARP, never to be reunited again.

On a few occasions, the LARPs that I attended would have a photographer character or a non-player photographer. During such events, I was able to either take photos of the LARP performance myself or use such photographs with the permission of the photographer. The photographs helped recall events that happened during the LARPs as well as compare my own and others' behaviour in and out of the games. All the photographs that I provide in this text were nevertheless taken by me.

In addition to on-site photographs, I captured the costumes and props I would gather and use for each character of each LARP I personally attended. This helped keep track of the objects that I used for participation, and reflect on these objects, their meanings, and the relationships I developed with them.

6.3.4 Objects and Spaces

As it already became evident, LARPs involve a great number of material aspects, which are essential to the creation and experiencing of the event. These include the props and costumes brought by LARPers to create their own characters, as well as props brought by the organisers to turn the LARP space into a fantasy world. All of the objects strongly support the LARP performance and thus become an important focus of the research.

Each LARPer is expected to bring the costume and props for their own character. These are usually assembled out of bits and pieces that are bought, made, commissioned, and/or borrowed from other LARPers. I bought or made most of my personal props and costumes, occasionally borrowing things from other LARPers. The collection of objects for a character became a process of preparation for the particular LARP. Through this process and through the use of the objects in LARPs, I developed strong relationships to and associations with the props and costumes. These changed, as I gained experience in LARP and as the specific objects were reused for the same or sometimes even for a different

character. I reflected on the gathering and use of LARP objects, as well as my developing relationship with them in my field notes.

In addition to personal props, LARP organisers use various materials to create the place of the particular game. These become a part of the LARP spaces, transforming them into different worlds. I captured many of these ephemeral spaces on photograph. I also thoroughly describe them in my field notes, reflecting on their influences on my experiences. Some materials used to create the space, such as prints and instructions, were given to players to keep. I have used these in a similar manner to the personal props and costumes to support my field notes.

The objects and spaces, their photographs and descriptions were used to support and develop other data of this research. I also compared the objects and spaces of different LARPs to map out how they influence experience in various ways. Moreover, I often discussed material aspects of LARPs with my interviewees in both informal and formal interviews. I asked interviewees to reflect on props and costumes they felt to be important, describe the feelings these evoked, and discuss them in context of their LARP experiences. On occasion, I would ask interviewees to show me props to see LARPers engage with the said objects. I also asked interviewees to discuss and compare various LARP spaces and their decoration to better understand the role and influence of material elements on LARP performances.

6.3.5 Online Materials

While I did not use netnography (Kozinets 2002b) as a research method, online materials and discussions heavily supported my engagement with LARP, as these are central elements of the activity. Soon after my first contact with the LARP context, it became apparent that the almost exclusive way of finding out about LARP events and applying to be a part of them is through social media.

Each LARP tends to have its own website and Facebook-event or -group. The website is used to post all official materials and documents, both practical and descriptive of the LARP world. I describe these in more detail later on. The Facebook event is more informal and is mainly used to gain visibility and to attract participants to the LARP. The event is also used to communicate about travelling to the LARP venue, which usually involves carpooling or taking public transport in groups. After the LARP, the Facebook event is used to thank organisers and other players, as well as discuss the LARP.

All the materials are also often sent to participants via email. Additionally, players personally receive character-specific materials through email. The personal materials always include a character sheet, which can vary considerably in length, but always communicates the character's general information, history, and goals. In some cases, personal information can also include descriptions of a group, community, or the family the character belongs to, as well as more general information that is unknown to other characters. I would meticulously study the materials when participating in LARPs to play my role and engage with the con-

text well. After the LARPs, I used the materials to support field notes in reliving the experiences, as well as to compare the materials of various LARPs to see what their effect was on the structure and experience of the events. In addition to gaining and studying LARP materials, I used social media and email correspondence for follow-ups of formal and informal interviews.

Lastly, I became very familiar with a few websites that aggregated news of LARP events and their development. These also contained some discussion of LARP-related topics. I followed these websites to keep up with new events to be able to register for them, and to occasionally follow discussions. The discussions themselves were not used as data, but supported my understanding of the context.

6.4 Cultural Context and Language

The study was conducted in Finland, the cultural context of which influences the data, its collection, and its presentation. Following Meriläinen et al. (2008), I believe that being aware of one's cultural context and its effects on the research creates more rigorous and insightful work.

A central part of a cultural context is its language. As Steyaert and Janssens (2013) stress, researchers need to be very aware of the differences of the languages that they work with, especially when the language of analysis and language of presentation are different. Consequently, it is important to note that all the interviews for this research were conducted and transcribed in Finnish. I analysed the Finnish text in order not to obscure what the interviewees were communicating. I have personally translated the excerpts used throughout the text into English. In translating, I put a lot of effort into keeping the tone and meanings communicated in the original language.

My field notes were written in English, Finnish and Russian, and analysed accordingly in English, Finnish, and Russian. Being trilingual, I feel that this does not pose a problem for the study. In fact, making notes in different languages allowed me to express observations, experiences, and reflections with greater nuance and detail, resulting in a deeper description and analysis.

6.5 Data Analysis

The data analysis was a continuous reflexive activity that lasted throughout the data collection process. Interpretation began as soon as the data collection started, which allowed me to adjust the research to the engagement in and change in understanding of the context (Bruner 1986; Schechner 2006). The different types of information and emergent points of view were accommodated into one whole, building on it through my developing perspectives (Arnould and Wallendorf 1994). My goal in analysing the data was to map out recurring performances in relation to the context, objects, spaces, individuals, and the relationships among these. Emerging themes were determined, grouped conceptually, and used to guide the research and analysis.

Analysis involved the search for patterns and processes, as well as ideas that help explain these, thus taking into consideration both emic and etic interpretations (Turner 1986; Goulding 2004). The analysis was embedded in and continuously linked to the theoretical perspectives and ideas of the research (Goulding 2004). I continuously critically compared data across the various data types, events, and interviewees, and discussed emerging themes in interviews (following Spiggle 1994). I analysed the data thoroughly after each LARP event and formal interview, comparing new and old experiences, as well as reflecting on how my understanding of the context and the performances in it changed and developed. The purpose of the continuous analysis was to refine emerging themes, search for new insights, and keep track of consistencies and inconsistencies. I regarded each data type in comparison and in context of both similar data and the whole data set.

Analysis was guided by a narrative structure to organise and give meaning to experiences, contexts, and performances (Bruner 1986). I transformed field notes and transcriptions into a summary form, using a LARP event as a unit of analysis (following Peñaloza 2000, 2001). This allowed for the creation of thick description of the performances and the comparison of LARPs as units of data for similarities and discrepancies in performances. I read through each unit of the data multiple times to get a sense of the whole, categorising the elements and parts of the performance. I derived the meanings of the performances by analysing relationships among the elements and their effects on performances. After analysing the LARPs, I compared the units of data to one another and to the literature, grouping the categories into overarching themes (following Kates 2002; Goulding 2004). These themes are discussed in detail in the next chapters.

6.6 Visual Art as a Means of Analysis and Communication

In addition to the more traditional methods of analysis that I described above, I used painting to support my research in terms of data analysis and the communication of findings. This has helped me structure, understand, and present my research work in more nuanced and interesting ways. Using art together with more traditional methods of qualitative research is an issue that has been widely discussed within the arts (e.g., Andersson 2009; Busch 2009; Hannula, Suoranta, and Vaden 2014), with some discussions spilling over to the humanities (e.g., Leavy 2009; Barone and Eisner 2012). Arts-based research has not been widely used in consumer culture research. Most notably, Sherry and Schouten (2002), Borgerson (2002), Rippin (2006), and Canniford (2012) used poetry to support their research.

Leavy (2009) suggests that art is an excellent tool for extending qualitative research. Various art forms can extend representation and express meaning that is beyond discursive communication (Leavy 2009; Barone and Eisner 2012), as they allow us to tap into phenomena beyond scientific classification (Busch 2009). Art-based research can bring more creativity and intuition into a study, disrupting "our comfortable assumptions" (Barone and Eisner 2012, p. 19) and making research more accessible publically. As Busch (2009) and Sheikh (2009) explain, there are

many ways in which art can be combined with research. It is important that neither consumes the other, but the two meet on equal terms (Andersson 2009) and combine features (Hannula, Suoranta, and Vaden 2014).

Andersson (2009) shows that the processes behind doing qualitative research and creating art are actually very similar. While art is commonly seen to exist in contrast to science, many similar skills are required in both. These include observation, an analytical mindset, and story telling (Barone and Eisner 2012). However, the outcomes of the two transpire to be very different: research is clearly positioned within a field and aims to present a concrete piece of knowledge, while art is more open to interpretation and aims to open up ideas to further inquiry (Andersson 2009; Svenungsson 2009; Hannula, Suoranta, and Vaden 2014). More importantly, a research paper and an art piece will always be ontologically different, even as they can be methodologically and epistemologically identical (Andersson 2009).

Following ideas similar to those underlying performance ethnography, art-based research becomes a co-performance, with the researcher taking on a central role (Holm 2008; Barone and Eisner 2012). In practice, art-based research involves investigation of the social world, and the reconfiguration and transformation of findings into art forms (Barone and Eisner 2012). The art can be researcher produced, subject produced, or already existing (Holm 2008). The visuals create a perspective that promotes emotional, embodied response and dialogue (Springgay 2003), allowing the description, exploration, and discovery of new meaning (Barone and Eisner 2012). Hence, art-based research is best suited to critical themes and explorative work of emotional experiences (Barone and Eisner 2012).

In this study, I turned to researcher created artwork (see Holm 2008) to support the analysis and representation of my findings. More specifically, I created paintings that express various theoretical and analytical aspects of this research project. I would describe the process to take the form of *art as research* "in that scientific processes or conclusions become the instrument of art and are used in the artworks" (Busch 2009, p. 3). Following Andersson (2009), I have used the same method and epistemology to inform both my research and my art. Neither art nor research was restricted to one another, as the processes and their outcomes existed in symmetry, informing and supporting one another (Andersson 2009; Busch 2009).

The process of painting aided me in understanding the theory I was reading and the data I was analysing, as well as in honing the ideas I was proposing myself. The main medium used for the paintings was acrylics on canvas, which I chose because of my familiarity and long-term practice with it that allowed me to express my ideas and experiences with relative ease. I have placed photographs of my paintings throughout this monograph in order to support my ideas and propositions, as well as give insight into my thought patterns. A full list of the artworks can be found in the table of contents.

Creating art helped me better understand my research work by structuring my thoughts and articulating them by other means than just writing and speaking. Concepts, theories, and my own findings gained clearer meanings and new perspectives, as I pushed them into visual form. Collingwood (1938) theorised that

the process of creating aesthetics makes us more aware of experiences and enhances our understanding in general. He believed that "proper" art is expressive and never just materialises a preconceived thought. The process of creating proper art rather becomes an act of thought and imagination that results in uncovering novel ideas and experiences, developing them and making them understandable to ourselves (Collingwood 1938). Visual processes can thus help us think and experience (Becker 2007; Bennett 2012). They aid in reconfiguring events in a way that allows us to apprehend them from different perspectives, generating possibilities, tracing connections, and revealing experiences we are not aware of (Bennett 2012).

In addition to helping me conduct the research, the finished paintings have further helped me present my research to others at conferences and workshops, obtain feedback and comments, as well as initiate discussions surrounding the research topic. Becker (2007) notes that using visuals can provide us with novel ideas and increase our understanding of phenomena by requiring individuals to work in order to attain full meaning. Art thus becomes a form of communication (Hatcher 1999) that forces individuals to stop and think (Walton 1990). Being compelled to figure things out for ourselves provides the potential for deeper analysis, new viewpoints, and endless possibilities (Hatcher 1999).

Picture 7 "Juxtapositions," acrylics on canvas, 40x60cm. The art piece represents the process and challenges of using various methods of data collection and analysis

7 THE LARP PERFORMANCE

In this chapter, I describe the performance of a LARP event. Before turning to a detailed account of the performance, a few words about LARPing in general. As I already pointed out previously, LARPs in Finland have no official community or groups, but individuals rather attend various events in a more-or-less unorganised manner. LARPers nevertheless form a fluid, but very open and supportive community. Moreover, the events themselves are well organised and structured.

Information about LARPs is spread through online tools, such as social media, email, and various "LARP calendars", that is, websites that gather LARP events. Most often, however, people learn about LARPs through word-of-mouth. Therefore, to obtain information on games, you need to know the people organising them. Rose exemplifies this:

> *Rose: Yeah, I was at a LARP at the end of last month…and then there was one just two weeks ago. That one was really ex tempore … so on Facebook … this totally revolves around the people you know…because there was this one LARP where you [the interviewer] were as well and I got to know people, friended them on Facebook and then there was a notification on Tammy's wall that they need a few people for this LARP in Nuuksio, like in the forest, a lot of action, vampires, werewolves. Then I thought about it for about half a minute and I was like yes, me, me! And like I had that Saturday off [work].*

Hence, while LARPers are open to newcomers, the created community is quite closed and even difficult to find. This is possibly explained by the fact that LARPing is very rarely a commercial activity, but is rather organised by its participants, as I will explain in more detail later in the chapter. Moreover, LARPing is somewhat of a stigmatised hobby. *"Before I started I thought [LARPing] was just weird people waving around swords and throwing dice,"* says Hope. Firstly, this is connected to the stigma attached to overall geek culture (see Kozinets 2001), which has considerable overlap with LARPing in terms of members and themes. Secondly, role-playing in general is commonly (and wrongly) connected to sexual activities, which *"makes people iffy"* (Laura, field note).

There seem to be three main ways through which individuals begin LARPing. The first and most common way seems to be through being passionate about or being a fan of some sort of popular culture. For instance, Dawn became excited about LARPing through being a fan of fantasy novels and movies, such as Harry Potter and Lord of the Rings. *"Harry Potter was a very very popular book back then [when I started LARPing] and it was sort of easy to go into that familiar world. Because you already*

knew all the things and you knew how to use a wand and stuff." LARPers in general tend to be very versed in popular culture, which can be seen in the themes of the performances as well as in the shared knowledge and understanding of media elements used as a basis for the interaction.

Secondly, prospective LARPers are often involved in hobbies that tie into LARP in some way. These include, for instance, various arts and crafts, writing, theatre, and other forms of RPG. LARP becomes a way to engage more actively and closely to this part of their lives. For instance, Rose was really enthusiastic about costuming and had been making medieval clothing as a hobby for a long time before she found LARPing. She remarks that *"there lives a little costumier inside me,"* but simply making clothes felt redundant to her. She had heard about LARPing online from her sister, and decided to give it a try. LARPing thus became a way to creatively develop her previous hobby and put her skills to use.

A third way individuals become interested in LARPing is through friends that are already involved in it. For instance, Hope became a LARPer through her friends, whom she met in an online community revolving around Harry Potter. *"They just kept talking about it and they were so excited, and then they were like come to this LARP with us!"* Hope was a bit unsure at first, but tagged along anyway. She fell in love with LARPing right away.

The games are created and organised by individual LARPers or groups of LARPers. The organisers are commonly referred to as game masters (GM). GMs write and structure the LARP, sometimes with the help of other participants. Moreover, GMs are in charge of all the elements of the event organisation, everything from booking a space and arranging meals to giving directions to participants when performing. LARPs are not scripted, but include a limited amount of written materials that the performance is based on, as I will explain in detail later on. These materials are original, but are often based on various popular culture elements as well as socially important, topical themes. The ideas that LARPs are organised around tend to be developed through interaction among LARPers. Below, Peg explains how she came to organise her first large LARP that was based on the Harry Potter films and books.

> *Peg: Well it started from when we were in [a pop culture convention] and we had a group cosplay. We were just hanging out with like 20 people and we were thinking that it would be so much fun to play these characters. Because at the con you can't really play them […] And so we were talking with a few people there and we got this feeling that it would be so much fun to organise a LARP. And then I was thinking that do I have the time and energy to start organising any LARP because it's so much work. But then I couldn't get the idea out of my head! And it's not like someone else would have organised it. So then I'll organise it! So then I just developed the idea more and more.*

LARPs are often based on popular culture sources, such as books, comic books, films, TV-shows, and video games. Wade explains: *"You get that all the time in games […] like all sorts of sci-fi and fantasy and horror... I feel like almost every game has some element like that."* Most common themes include fantasy and science fiction, although more historical and realistic themes are also common. Moreover, my interviewees have noted that the themes of LARPs are closely tied to and influ-

enced by popular culture fads. For instance, the popularity of zombie movies, video games, TV-shows, and comic books (e.g., The Walking Dead, I am Legend, Resident Evil, World War Z, Warm Bodies) resulted in more zombie-themed LARPs and the use of zombie characters or zombie outbreak themes in LARPs.

LARPs always set an age limit, which ranges from 15 to 18 years of age, depending on the themes and intensity of the game. The minimum of 15 years of age ensures individuals can cope with being away from home and can deal with the emotional issues of the LARP. LARPs also tend to involve some sort of attendance cost. This varies very much from game to game, but covers LARP-specific costs, such as the rent for the location, food and drinks provided to players, as well as props for general use and decorating the space. In addition to the attendance cost, LARPers are expected to cover their own costs for travel, snacks, as well as their own props, costumes, and make up.

LARPs differ greatly in size, length, and theme, but they take on a fairly similar performance structure. Below I describe the structure of a LARP performance from the perspective of a participant LARPer, who is not organising the event. I divide the LARP event roughly into three sections: before the LARP, during the LARP, and after the LARP. The division reflects the three stages of theatre performance described by Schechner (2006): proto-performance, performance, and aftermath.

7.1 Before the LARP Event

Before a LARPer can participate in a LARP event, a number of preparatory performances need to take place. I describe these in detail in this section.

7.1.1 Signing Up and Getting a Character

In order to participate in a LARP, individuals need to sign up for it. This usually occurs through an online or email form that can be found on the LARP's individual website. The form is completed and sent to the GMs. The forms vary in length, but involve quite similar questions, such as contact information, dietary restrictions, previous experience in LARPing, as well as character and plotline preferences. LARPers may also discuss possible characters with GMs, especially if player involvement in the writing process is allowed or preferred. While some LARPers prefer to play a specific type of character, most LARPers like to try out various characters and various game styles, as this ensures that they get different experiences and do not become bored with the activity. LARPers often talk about *"trying something new"* (Wade) or playing a type of LARP or LARP character they have not played for a while.

> *Wade: When I sign up for games, I've usually written something that I feel like would be fun to play, and maybe also based on what I played last. Like last time I played some drama soap opera so this time I want action, so sort of like that…you wanna try out different things.*

LARPers like to try out very different characters, as this broadens their perspective and lets them explore different types of experiences. Dawn says, *"I really like trying different types of characters […] because you can really let everything out as a character and it's really freeing."* Rose adds that *"it's interesting because they have different environments, different events, different people, and stuff like that."*

Most LARPs receive roughly the same number of applicants as they have characters. However, because LARPs are often relatively small events, involving about 30 characters, many of the games cannot accommodate all applicants. Dot, Peg, Sue, and May, who have organised LARPs, describe the selection of players, often referred to as casting, as being organised according to individuals' preferences for and suitability for the characters. GMs want to create a diverse and open group of players in the LARP in order to have an exciting and lively experience. Fit to character does not refer to physical aspects, but rather a player's experience and openness to new challenges. Casting often aims at ignoring players' disabilities (e.g., physical disabilities, as well as sight, speech, and hearing impediments) and demographic characteristics (e.g., gender, race, and age). However, there have also been cases of cronyism and favouritism in casting, which has resulted in animosity within the community. This type of behaviour has created some tensions among LARPers, most of whom seem to want the community to be open and equal for all. Moreover, not getting cast can be emotionally difficult for LARPers, especially if they are new to the community.

Dawn explains that casting generally aims to be transparent and equal, but having experience in LARPing definitely makes a difference in the GMs' choices. LARPs do not have main and side characters (apart from NPCs), but there are characters with different levels of authority, responsibility, and social status. The more authoritative characters usually have a more central position in the hierarchy and community created within the LARP, tend to have longer contact lists and more goals for the game, and can strongly affect the structure and development of the overall LARP. Such characters may, for example, be a tribe elder, a king, or a queen. These characters are usually given to more experienced players, as they require more preparation and active engagement. They can be challenging and emotionally difficult, leaving newer players overwhelmed. LARPers new to the hobby thus tend to be given less complex and emotionally difficult characters that have shorter contact lists and less goals. These easier types of characters tend to require less preparation and allow their players to be more reactive rather than active in the LARP performance. While differing from one another, a good set of characters should fit the LARP world, complement one another, and have enough material and agency for their player to work with.

When applicants are not chosen for the game or send in their application too late, they are usually put on a waiting list for a character. Most people on the waiting list usually get a character for the LARP, because every game will involve a number of cancellations due to things like sickness, scheduling conflicts, or rescheduling of the LARP itself.

7.1.2 Game Materials

When applicants are chosen for a LARP, they receive an information package about it. The general information is usually available on the LARP website and is also sent out to participants via email, while more specific information on the game is only distributed privately to individuals through email and/or social media.

The amount of information provided varies from game to game, depending on the GM and player preferences as well as the goals and themes of the LARP. However, it needs to be in balance. On the one hand, too little information in the materials can result in a lack of understanding of the character and what to do with it. For example, Rose feels *"it's more fun when there is more information than when there is less of it."* She explains that she has had negative experiences with a lack of shared information among players. This has lead to a lack of basis for the performance of the character and misguided interaction among LARPers. On the other hand, too much information can create an overwhelming experience. Rose has pointed out that she attended a game with dozens of pages of game materials. The LARP was very stressful to prepare for, as she could not remember all the details or come to grips with all the information provided.

While the amount of information varies, the different types of information are always present in LARP materials. These include practical information, information on the LARP world, and the individual character sheets. The information on the practicalities has the most standard structure of all the LARP materials. It is distributed to everyone, and can usually also be found online. Such information includes the time and place of the event, how to get to the venue, information on the venue, how much it will cost and when the payment is due, contact information for the organisers, what you are expected to bring with you (including both the types of props you are expected to brings, as well as necessary personal items, such as a sleeping bag if you are staying overnight), and information on the food that will be provided (most games offer a couple of meals that are included in the cost of the game, but players are usually encouraged to bring their own snacks just in case, as LARPs can be very energy draining). The practical information also includes the rules of LARP, which seem to have developed so that they are quite similar among games. The rules ensure safety and shared understanding of the LARP. I will discuss the rules in more detail in the section on the "brief".

Information on the LARP world is also quite widely distributed, with most of it being available online on the LARP website. This type of information varies a great deal from LARP to LARP in both the amount and the kind of information provided. The variation depends on the sources, goals, and themes of the LARP. If a LARP is fully or partially based on specific media, references to the source are usually made. Moreover, it is made clear whether media stories are strictly followed, modified somehow for easier gameplay, or mixed with other themes from popular culture for a more original context. When LARP worlds are more original, GMs tend to write a longer description and history for the world of their game. In more generic settings, LARPers are often expected to be somewhat familiar with source materials. Depending on the themes of the LARP, information on its world may include things like the political situation and political factions, races and

minority groups, subcultures, secret societies, and important recent events. Common information on the world includes a list of characters, places and persons of interest, characters that everyone is expected to know, historical events, norms and conventions, as well as common terminology. The information is meant to create a shared understanding of the world and support the LARP experience.

The player's own character sheet is usually not shared with other players, and is confidential to the specific player. The character sheet includes information on the character's personality, history, and goals for the game. Goals differ from game to game, and character to character. They may include such things as sorting out a quarrel or a problem, gaining someone's trust, pursuing a love interest, or assassinating another character. The character will always have a set of contacts, that is, a list of other characters in the LARP that the character is somehow connected to and has a relationship or history with. The contacts form a social network of sorts for the character. The character may also be a part of a specific community that may or may not be disclosed to other players, such as a family, a religious group, or a secret society. Some of the character specific information may be secret and revealed only though gameplay to create interesting drama.

LARPs in Finland tend to be almost fully written by GMs. Nevertheless, some games require the attending LARPers to either partially or fully write their own characters based on some grounding information. This is more common for games that are directly based on media canon, as individuals would be familiar with the premise. The GMs themselves nevertheless always add details and goals to these self-written characters, adjusting them to fit the other characters and the context of the LARP.

All of the provided materials serve as a basis or a starting point for the LARP, in which the various characteristics and goals are then played out and developed by the LARPers through interacting with the context and other participants. Most of the materials are free to interpretation and some modification.

7.1.3 Preparing for the Character

> *Dawn: I usually can't wait to get the character and then when I get it I'm like wow! The character's here! And then you read it a few times before the game and then when the game is coming up you're totally in panic like who were my contacts?! Help! But then when you pick out props, then you start getting into the atmosphere of the character completely.*

After receiving their characters, LARPers take the time to prepare for them and develop them. This initially involves going through all of the game materials: "*First I read the character many times over with care and think up all the important details and the props"* (Peg). LARPers sometimes add or fill in information on their characters, thus making them more complex. This includes both bodily and cognitive characteristics, for example elements of the character's past, additional personality characteristics, bodily mannerisms, or even minor details, such as food preferences.

Depending on the character, LARPers may also need to additionally search for and go through information that would be important for the character to know. For instance, in one LARP I had a character who was an expert in astronomy. I prepared by reading some general information online as well as taking out some books on the topic from the library. LARPers readily prepare for characters in this way, often studying minor details that may be unfamiliar to them, such as a political stance or religious beliefs. Sometimes the researched information is modified to fit the game materials and the LARP world. For instance, my astronomy expert lived in a parallel universe where magic was possible. I quite freely edited a lot of the new information I learned on the subject of astronomy to fit the fantasy universe. In addition to fantasy worlds with supernatural elements or different laws of physics, information may need to be edited for games set in the past or in the future. For example, I have played multiple characters in LARPs set in the 1800s or early 1900s. Here, I needed to disregard many technological developments common to me in everyday life to portray the character in a more truthful fashion. Overall, the character needs to make sense to their player and other LARPers, and be logical in the context of that particular game; *"it needs to be a whole"* (Rose).

Almost any LARP character will differ from their player on some level. Firstly, LARPers portray characters that differ from themselves on a physical and bodily level. This includes things like difference in age and sex, or having some type of disability, such as blindness or a limp. Secondly, the portrayed characters often differ from the LARPer in various types of beliefs, morals, perspectives, and emotional responses. Lastly, characters differ in their social status. A single LARP will often form a community, meaning that there are characters ranging from leaders to the lower class. LARPs also tend to involve many marginalised characters, such as sexual, religious, and racial minorities. Nevertheless, all the characters are seen to be equally important from the point of view of the performance, meaning that the players themselves are not marginalised through their characters.

Preparation develops the character and makes it more personal to the player. The process also aids the game, as prepared LARPers have a much better experience and are able to support one another's performance. LARPers point out that the first impression of the character on paper usually never sticks, but the character rather develops as you prepare for the LARP: *"it really never goes as you plan it"* (Peg). In addition to going through LARP materials, the preparation process usually involves propping, mental and physical preparation, and preparation with other LARPers. I describe each of the elements in detail below.

7.1.3.1 Props

Preparing for a LARP character always involves acquiring props for them. Prop is a term almost directly borrowed from the realm of theatre that is used by LARPers to refer to the costume and personal objects of a character in a particular LARP. Wade points out that he thinks very thoroughly about the props before going to a LARP, sometimes planning months ahead: "*I always think beforehand what things I need and I look for guides in the materials, but I also think what would be, like, natural*

for that character and that world and situation." Dawn elaborates that propping is exciting and emotional: *"Propping is really fun, I really really like it. Then often you get a prop crisis, but you always get over it."* Props are necessary as stimuli for *"developing the character"* (Rose) before the LARP, as well as perceiving and reacting to others as characters in the LARP itself. The props create a physical image of and a bodily basis for the character that its player as well as other LARPers in the game can use to help them become immersed in the fantasy world. As Peg point out: *"The external stuff, the props, they can really help […] they create an atmosphere, a feeling".* Gathering all of the necessary items for a particular character is thus a central part of the preparation for a LARP.

Picture 8 Props

Props include a character's entire outfit, including shoes and possibly a wig (see Picture 8 for examples). Additionally, props include any character-specific personal items that are necessary for or somehow add to the character. These can include things like weapons, jewellery, books, maps, as well as headgear or eye accessories. As an example, a wizard character may require a wand as a prop, a soldier character may require a gun replica, and a scholar character may require writing paper and a pen.

Props can become very detailed. Sue and Dot, for instance, often use character-specific perfumes and deodorants in LARPs. Wade always tries to wear authentic underwear to create a complete character. He points out that small details in props are usually done for oneself, as *"it's not like any other player would notice them, but* you *know it and it can bother you a lot."* These details make the character feel more real and more authentic, as they support his or her characteristics, values, and interests, as well as make the character's history come to life. Props can

further be given characteristics that are physically impossible or difficult to achieve. For instance, an item may be cursed or have other magical effects. Such characteristics are achieved through placing an OFF-game note on the prop, that is, written instructions about the prop. I explain being OFF-game in more detail later on.

Props are never ready-bought outfits, but are compiled piece by piece, as this feels more personal and authentic to players. The pieces can be either hand-made or bought, the latter often in specialty or thrift stores. Preparing and picking out props is referred to by LARPers as prop hunting, and becomes a way for the LARPer to explore and engage with the mindset of the character. The process helps understand, perform, and plan the character. Rose elaborates on the process:

> *Rose: If you make them yourself, then of course you put in a lot more time and effort and from that perspective they're much more…like…your own, but I also often make props that I've bought really personal. It's interesting how it works…some clothes or props just scream at you in the store 'you're mine!' or like I mean 'I'm yours!' and then you have to get it [laughs] I spend so much money on this…*

Props are also sometimes borrowed from or exchanged with other LARPers, especially if an item is expensive or difficult to find (e.g. a weapon replica or specific insignia). "*With LARPers it's also great that if you don't happen to find some accessory, then you can always ask for advice from others, or to borrow from others"* (May). LARPers often discuss props for a specific LARP on social media or through emails, asking for advice on making, buying, or borrowing specific props. Moreover, this allows co-ordination of props to make them coherent among LARPers for the performance.

LARPers point out that the LARP community is not strict about the authentic look and feel of props in the way other similar hobbies, such as Cosplay or historical re-enactment, are. "*LARPers appreciate if you just try. And people do try, like they'll go around flea markets for weeks and weeks, just to find the perfect shirt, jewellery, or shoes"* (May). Authenticity is nevertheless appreciated and often a certain minimum effort is implicitly required, as Dawn points out: *"There are some things... like if someone comes to a historical LARP in sneakers, then you're sort of like why couldn't you just put on darker shoes?!"*

The quality and detail of props varies from person to person. Most LARPers put a lot of effort into their props, as this helps them *"get to know the character much better"* (Hope). Many LARPers also feel pressure to create or gather a good set of props in order to support the creation of a good experience for everyone. Props that *"feel right"* (Dawn) add much to the experience of a LARP both for the player as well as their co-players. LARPers appreciate everyone's effort to prop and prepare well, which, in turn, creates the self-driven pressure to do their own part in the creation of the fantasy atmosphere. *"It bothers me immensely!"* says Wade. *"Like especially if I've been making all these historical gear and then how can I participate when my undershirt is a normal T-shirt?! Which of course no one actually sees."* Individuals are rarely annoyed at others' lack of effort, and focus more on their own possible "imperfections". Dawn says: "*I really annoy myself if I forget something or don't have the*

time for something. Like I have an awesome vision [for an outfit], but don't have time to complete it! That really vexes me." Wade describes a similar situation:

> *Wade: I could probably have done many [props] a lot easier than I have. Like I did not have to make a complete Viking outfit by hand, but I have. So you do do it for yourself because in the long run it looks pretty much the same whether you bought it ready or had it made or sewed it on a machine or by hand or something else. It doesn't really matter if one stitch looks wrong. It doesn't show. But then you know there's a difference, that something is flawed. So you acknowledge it and it bothers you. So in that sense [propping] is for other people. That you don't show up in a towel-cape and sneakers. Because you know everyone else puts in effort so then I have to put in effort as well. But do you just recombine old clothes or do you make clothes…there's a lot of options.*

The LARP world will usually vaguely point towards a specific aesthetic, such as a medieval fantasy or futuristic cyber punk, which generally has roots in popular culture and thus sets all the players on a similar visual track. Sometimes characters may be directly based in popular culture, in which case LARPers can use imagery from the source materials. Even if a LARP is not directly based on a specific narrative, LARPers often use popular culture for inspiration and as a visual guide for acquiring their props. Moreover, this allows LARPers to easily communicate meanings already imbued in specific visual elements. Rose describes propping for a vampire character: *"In this last LARP when I was thinking about the propping, I searched through all sorts of Underworlds and things because vampires aren't really a familiar thing to me. So I had to do a little research […] I wanted my coat open in that action movie way and I still need to get Tomb Raider guns from somewhere."* Rose further stresses that props do need to be somewhat practical. This vampire LARP was played in a forest in winter, and she thus needed to *"combine being warm and still being vampire-like."*

When propping, LARPers tend to avoid using everyday objects and their personal items, even when these would fit the character's visuals. This is because such items hold too much personal meaning and represent their selves too much. Personal objects can be distracting to both the player and other participants, and can even break the fantasy performance. Dot describes being utterly disappointed when she had to take out her reading glasses during a LARP: *"I felt really bummed out, I felt like I was back at school and it just somehow was disappointing that I had to take the glasses out."* LARPers tend to use objects that are unfamiliar to them, often turning to props that are exotic or cliché. They also often remove various personal items, such as jewellery, piercings, and glasses when LARPing in order to remove their own image from the experience of the character.

Long-time LARPers tend to build up large collections of props, which they often recombine for new characters. "*I do recycle clothes a lot in games, because I don't want to make a new set of pants and get new shirts for each game. It costs a lot and is just somehow redundant. Because it's not just the prop, but it's also the context and everything around it*" (Wade). It is thus the combinations of props, not individual pieces, which helps support the development and emergence of the LARP character in creating its material side. LARPers want each character to feel different and, as a result, do not like reusing entire prop sets, as these leave a trail of experiences and emotions

from a previous character. LARPers nevertheless recombine and mix props for different games, usually always adding something new.

> *Rose: I guess that if I had the same outfit which fits two different games perfectly, I wouldn't really want to use exactly the same outfit. For example. For this game that's coming up, I know I can probably find pretty fitting props, and if I wanted to go cheap I'd just use them, but I would rather want something from a different world and so I'm stupid and I go buy new props because I want to be different from what I was before [laughs].*

While props are reusable, they are not often disposable. Rose points out that she cannot throw props away as she feels she may need them for future LARPs. Dot, on the other hand, has saved specific props as they have gained nostalgic value and *"remind [her] of specific LARPs"*. Props and other LARP materials are stored away, with LARPers coming back to them occasionally for partial reuse or reminiscing.

> *Rose: Sometimes I get the feeling…like sometimes I want to just look at some old costumes and like [think about] where I've used it. Maybe try it on. And of course I think that can I use it again somewhere.*

All in all, the props need to fit and feel personal to the character, as well as communicate their characteristics, history, and attitudes. *"It's like this white shirt is ok, but I'll take this pink one! Because it screams my character. That's a really important thing!"* Dawn explains. The character is heavily based in the embodied aspects created by the props and the meanings that are communicated through their use, thus becoming a guide in the performance for both the LARPer using them and their co-performers. Individuals often practice putting on props before the actual LARP to see how they look or to test out different elements. However, the meanings of props only fully emerge throughout the LARP itself, as the character comes to life.

7.1.3.2 Preparing for the Character

In addition to preparing the appearance of the character through propping, LARPers prepare both cognitively and bodily to get into character. As Lin (2012) has pointed out, the body can be crafted in the same way props or clothes are. The effort put into this varies from LARPer to LARPer, but all LARPers do prepare for the character in some form. May explains:

> *May: … if, for example, [the character] is that type of lone wolf character then you tend to go, or you tend to do the sort of thing that you think 'I'm alone, I'm independent, I don't need anybody'. Like that kind of mentality. And you might start doing that a few days before the LARP. And then with a more social character you try to do stuff like, I might get in touch with my contacts before the game and talk a bit about how they interact, and what they know about each other, stuff like that. And you get to know the character so you know how to react to things, I mean that says a lot about a*

> *character, how they interact with their friends and enemies and things like that. And during that you start to learn what goes on in their head. And that makes it easier to immerse into the character.*

LARPers stress that understanding the character, contacts, history, and context around which you will be playing is key to becoming that character during a LARP. Therefore, understanding the various cognitive elements of the character is central. This includes the characters emotional state, beliefs, morals, and opinions.

To prepare for and understand their character, LARPers also focus on various bodily characteristics. Interviewees describes thinking about and practicing various elements of their characters such as how they move and talk, what kind of habits and mannerisms they have, and, most importantly, how they react to events and other characters.

Both the bodily and the mental sides of the character are important to create a different *"frame of mind"* (May) or *"mood"* (Dot) that you take on for the LARP.

> *Dot: …you have to start with what kind of person [the character] is. Like are they generally negative or positive, like are they a cheerful person. […] also like how they approach other people, are they superior or inferior. How they stand… like their posture. Then also you need to figure out the voice and how they speak. Do they have a word that they repeat …or mannerisms? So all sorts of stuff like that.*

The type of preparation described by Dot is common and central to character development for LARPers, as it lets them explore the character and test the character out *"in action"*. This supports the LARP experience by making it easier to act and react as the character, thus supporting one's own and others' performance. However, LARPers stress that while understanding the character beforehand is helpful, detailed planning of a character's game and plotlines is pointless, as *"it only really becomes clear during the game what the character and their plotlines are really like"* (Wade). Rose elaborates on that point, saying that characters start *"living a life of their own."*

LARPers' preparation is also often based on imitating examples, which tend to be taken from popular culture. In explaining an upcoming medieval fantasy character, Rose says: *"I'll use a lot of Tolkien and Weisman and Salvatore."* If a LARPer bases their preparation on a character directly, they may prepare by reading or watching media that involves this character. Wade explains that he used the TV-show *Sherlock* as the basis for one of his LARP characters: "*I was watching the new Sherlock a few weeks ago and I was like my character could be Moriarti, he's just like that guy!"* Individuals thus connect the character to a role model or role characteristics, an archetype of sorts. LARPers may also combine multiple characters in preparing or even base their ideas on people who they know, as Dot exemplifies:

> *Dot: If I have a character that is a guy… like I have friends who are guys, so I'll just ask them directly how do I do this and that so I think…or I'll think about how a man thinks in certain situation or handles a certain situation."*

7.1.3.3 Preparation among LARPers

Most preparation for LARPs is done individually, but some LARPers like to also prepare in groups with the players of their character's contacts. Most commonly these take the form of short face-to-face discussions, via email, or through social media. *"Yeah, I do talk to [other LARPers] a lot on Facebook, planning future games and such"* (May). Discussions normally involve LARPers who will play close contacts with the aim of creating an interesting plotline or a better understanding of their characters' relationship. Moreover, this allows individuals to toss around ideas for their characters and fill in new details.

> *My character was a part of a family of characters, and the other players wanted to discuss some details before the game. We ended up having a lengthy discussion on Facebook about our characters' family history. This was not so central for the game, but helped build on the characters. (Field note)*

Although not common, some GMs organise meet-ups or workshops before the actual LARP event. These are uncommon because of the geographical spread of players, as well as the lack of time and resources of both GMs and participants. Meet-ups involve casual get-togethers for players, where they can meet each other and discuss their characters. Workshops are more structured and usually involve practicing specific elements for the LARP, such as dancing, singing, or battle re-enactment. Workshops may also be used to create or develop the LARP itself and its materials, focusing on character, social network, world, or plotline development among LARPers.

7.2 During the LARP Event

The LARP event itself varies in length, ranging from just a few hours to several days. A typical LARP will usually last about 6-10 hours, with individuals staying the night before and after at the venue to prepare and then help to clear up. This is because most games take place in venues that are far away from and removed from LARPers' everyday contexts. The games are usually scheduled during a weekend to accommodate work and school schedules. It is common for LARPers to arrive at the venue on Friday evening and leave on Sunday morning.

In this section I describe the experiences involved in performing the LARP event, which starts with getting to the venue and preparing for the game both individually and in groups. This is followed by the LARP game, and concluded by an after-game discussion.

7.2.1 Getting to the LARP

LARPs usually take place in venues that are completely outside individuals' everyday social context. The LARPs are thus removed both spatially and temporally from LARPers' day-to-day lives. The venues are most often rented cabins, camping sites, youth or community centres (see examples in Picture 9). As these sites

are off the grid, the most common way of getting to LARP venues is carpooling. Carpooling is usually organised through the LARP's Facebook event or email list by the LARPers themselves. Depending on the venue and the beginning of the game, LARPers either arrive the morning of the game or the night before.

Picture 9 LARP venues

A few days before the LARP event and at the latest on the way to it, LARPers start feeling very excited, but at the same time nervous about the upcoming performance.

> *Dawn: "When you're on the way to a game, it's like yay! I get to go to a game! This is so cool! But at the same time, it's like I haven't read the character enough […] and like I haven't thought about the character enough and then if there's an unexpected situation and gaaah! Would my character do this or this? … You should really prepare for each game well and think about the character beforehand."*

The LARP event is simultaneously exciting and daunting, as LARPers feel that they are never prepared enough. LARPers describe feeling pressure to prop correctly and authentically for a LARP, and to portray their character in a believable manner. Yet, at the same time, they stress that the *"aim is to have fun"* (Dot) and that you *"can't be good or not good at LARPing"* (Peg). As an unsaid rule, everyone strives to create an authentic atmosphere and an experience that everyone enjoys. The point for LARPers is not just to have fun, but also to create a good experience for other people. LARPers thus experience a self-imposed pressure to do well, and simultaneously perceive this to be paradoxical, as there are no concrete expectations set for players.

7.2.2 Preparing for the Game

Once at the venue, LARPers usually have some time to themselves before the LARP starts. This is filled by discussions with other players as well as preparation for the LARP. While the LARP community is not strictly organised, many players know one another, as roughly the same people attend LARPs in a specific geographic area. LARPers do not necessarily see one another outside LARP events and are thus often very excited to talk to their friends. Reunions before the start of a LARP are often very emotional, with people hugging one another and engaging in joyful discussions. It is interesting to note that while most LARPers know one another well, surprisingly little discussion about anyone's everyday or "real" lives takes place at LARP events. Even the more casual conversations among LARPers will revolve around the upcoming LARP or previous and future LARPs, as well as the characters and plotlines of these games.

> *We got to the LARP by bus and we were the first ones there. As people arrived, we were all hugging one another, as it was nice to see all of them. We discussed the events of the few previous games most of us had been to, laughing at all the drama and discussing characters' relationships and attitudes to one another. We also talked a bit about the current LARP, telling each other about our characters and their relationships, even speculating a bit what will happen. (Field note)*

The time between arriving at the game venue and the LARP game starting is usually filled with commotion and racket. While there is a lot of casual hanging around, GMs are busy organising the game and the venue, attending to last minute touches and tying together loose ends in the materials. At the same time, LARPers are busy worrying about and preparing for their characters as well as helping with overall arrangements. As LARPers prepare, they usually engage in three central performances: contacting, propping, and organising the space. I discuss these next.

7.2.2.1 Contacting

Contacting is a LARP term that refers to discussions among LARPers who will be playing contacts, which a focus on their characters' relationship. Contacts include

any types of characters that have a relationship, ranging both in strength (e.g., acquaintance, sibling, lover) and type or relationship (e.g., love, friendship, animosity). The amount of contacts one has depends on the LARP and the character, ranging from just a few to all of the characters in the game. Through experience, I have noticed that most LARP characters only have a few central contacts, with which they interact during the game. These may be given in the materials or may emerge through the performance of the game.

The aim of contacting is to gain an understanding of the characters that will be important and close to one's character during the LARP. LARPers learn what the other characters look like visually, and, more importantly, they gain insight into how players have interpreted the various characters and their relationship. This creates a shared understanding of the social network that will be performed during the LARP. While contacting may take place long before the actual event, it more commonly happens at the LARP venue, as people have easier access to one another and can easily step away from the general hubbub to have a talk privately.

In practice, contacting involves two or more LARPers stepping to the side and discussing their characters. When I contact with other LARPers in games, we first sum up our own characters as well as our interpretation of the character's attitudes, values, and central characteristic. After that, we discuss how they their relationship works, how they interact, and even plan what we might do during the game. Sometimes it has been necessary to make up elements of the history between characters. For instance, when LARPing a couple with someone, we might make up a back story to how the characters met just in case a conversation around the topic arises during the LARP. Rose explains: *"I wanna know who I am and how I react to things, and that's in many ways in the history…I like that the character has a history."* While LARPers prepare well in advance, many elements are changed or modified through contacting to create characters and their interaction, the meanings of which are shared among the involved players.

7.2.2.2 Propping

Propping, that is, the process of putting on the character's props, is the central element for LARPers to immerse themselves in their character and prepare for the LARP at the venue. The LARP game usually has a rough schedule as to when the LARP is due to start and end. Depending on the difficulty and amount of propping that needs to be done, LARPers will begin propping from a few hours to an hour before the beginning of the game. LARPers describe the process of propping to be almost ritualistic in helping them make the change from self to character. Rose explains that *"the propping helps a lot […] It's like a ritual that draws you into the character."* Sue also elaborates on the matter: *"When everyone is getting ready, propping … you get this atmosphere that something really great is about to happen."* I provide some examples of fully propped characters in Picture 10.

Picture 10 LARP characters

In addition to putting on the clothes that create the character's costume, propping includes a whole array of practices that transform the LARPer's appearance. LARPers usually put on makeup or face and body paint. Depending on the character, the makeup can range from very subtle everyday make-up to quite radical changes in appearance that use professional body paints and prosthetics (e.g., fake scars, horns, unusually shaped ears or noses). The latter is common for non-human characters. Contact lenses are also quite popular both for the purpose of not wearing glasses as well as colouring one's irises. Hair is another point of transformation that is key to propping. Players always do their hair somehow,

going as far as colouring it temporarily or growing facial hair for a specific character. They may also choose to wear a wig and put on fake facial hair to transform their appearance. Chase describes how a fake beard created the finishing touch to his character transformation: *"I noticed with Cole [a character] that when he has a beard …that really helped a lot with getting into character."*

While each LARPer props themselves to become the character they are to portray in the LARP, the ritual of propping is by no means an individualistic performance. People tend to gather in the same room to prop, helping each other and sharing their resources. People will comment on one another's props and help make last-minute improvements. LARPers help each other with their hair and their makeup, and lend various items to one another. Many LARPers will bring extra props that fit the theme of the game, such as weapon replicas or jewellery, and lend them to others in order to help expand their characters. This communal experience of physical transformation builds up emotion and energy for the LARP game, which helps individuals step away from their selves and their everyday life. The shared ritual supports and intensifies the excitement that LARPers are feeling, creating a community out of the individual characters that are about to emerge. The physical transformation thus also aids the mental one.

7.2.2.3 Organising the Space

An important element of the LARP is the space that it takes place in. The venue is usually secluded so that the LARP can happen in peace without other people accidentally wandering in. The space is also chosen with the LARP in mind so that it supports the LARP world and players' performance in it. Consequently, a LARP set in a medieval fantasy world would probably be played at a cabin in the middle of a forest, while a science fiction LARP would most likely be played in a more modern building. However, a great deal can be left to the imagination.

Picture 11 Propping LARP spaces

The venue, just like the individuals in it, is usually propped for the LARP (see examples in Picture 11). Firstly, the aim is to remove or cover up any distracting elements of the venue that will impede or break the LARPers' performance. For instance, a youth centre may have a notice board full of information irrelevant to

the LARP, or a camping sight might have pictures of previous tenants. These distracting elements are usually draped or stored away. Furniture is sometimes moved around to build up a different atmosphere in the space.

> *We had a lengthy discussion on propping the LARP space and how it should be done. One of the LARPers summed up the conversation well: "It is better to take stuff away and make the space neutral…because that reduces the break in immersion" (Field note)*

Secondly, the GMs and other LARPers prop the space to fit the LARP world. The space needs to be authentic, natural, and believable, yet not necessarily realistic. The propping varies greatly from game to game, depending on the theme, venue, and budget of the LARP. Propping usually includes things like draping furniture and walls, putting up posters or insignia, as well as placing other decorative or practical items that may be necessary for the game or merely support its aesthetics. Just like personal props, the props for the space are pieced together through various items that are bought or hand-made. Very specific items, such as fictional insignia or maps, are usually made specifically for the game. As Wade explains, propping does not need to be perfect, but adds a lot to the LARP's atmosphere.

> *Wade: Well, I have played games where we're in a classroom propped with tape on the floor, which we pretended is a spaceship…so [propping the space] doesn't matter in a sense, but it does create a certain atmosphere. Especially if it's a historic game where people are like 'we're monks from the 1500s' and everyone has the clothes of a monk from the 1500s and the gear of a monk from the 1500s which is like really detailed and everything…so there it would bother me…*

The materials and objects used for propping are brought by the GMs themselves and sometimes also by other players. Many players volunteer to bring or make props for the space, and sometimes props are created as a communal effort, for instance, during a meet or workshop preceding the LARP that I described earlier (see Picture 12). LARPers are generally very open to helping organise and prop the space, as well as help with any other arrangement for the game. People that live nearest to the LARP space may also arrive earlier to help the GMs, as it is more convenient for them. For instance, I have usually gone to game venues much earlier to help out when LARPs have been organised in Helsinki, as the trip is shorter and more convenient for me to make. LARPers seem to that like it is their obligation to help with organising the space and the LARP, as it helps create a better experience for everyone.

Picture 12 Making props

In addition to propping and reorganising, the space usually needs to be cleaned and food needs to be prepared. In general, everyone helps out in cleaning and cooking. At times, one or more NPCs that that have been given a discount for or are exempt from the LARP fee will cook and serve the food.

7.2.3 Brief

> *Right before the LARP started, we had a brief, in which we went over the world of the LARP and each character was briefly introduced. The GMs also went over all the rules of the LARP: things like when and with what cue the game begins and ends, what to do if someone got injured, the forest area and cabin that the game was spatially restricted to. We also went over what to do if characters got into a physical fight. The movements were to be slowed down and the result of the fight was to be discussed among players. The GMs showed us an example of a battle. (Field note)*

The brief is the most formal part of the pre-game LARP event, and takes place at every LARP. The brief is a LARP term for a quite formal account of directions and guidelines made by the GM to players on the LARP. The brief generally happens immediately before the LARP begins, usually after everyone has propped. Everyone gathers in one space for the brief and is expected to listen carefully. The brief varies in length depending on things like how complex the world is, how secret some of the information is, or how many types of rules are involved in the LARP.

The aim of the brief is to ensure the safety of everyone during the LARP and to affirm a shared understanding of the starting point of the LARP. The GM makes sure that all the LARPers know the rules they need to follow as well as have a clear knowledge of the context they will be interacting in and how this interacting can be done. Briefs tend to be quite exhaustive in terms of information, and

serve as a way of reminding players of all the things they need to know, clearing up any misunderstandings they may have.

The brief varies considerably from game to game, but usually involves the following three points: the information on the LARP world, the specifics of the LARP space, and the rules structuring the LARP performance. Firstly, the GM always quickly goes through all the general information provided to the players, such as the LARP world, its history, politics, and subcultures. In most LARPs, the brief will also include a short introduction to each character and, if relevant, of each subgroup or community. This may be omitted, if the game includes a large number of participants, or if character-specific information is intentionally withheld.

Secondly, the GM discussed the space of the LARP and its restrictions. In some larger LARPs, the brief may also include walking around the area. LARPs are confined to specific areas, which typically include both indoors and outdoors. The spaces are designated a use within the LARP, which may or may not correspond with their "real" purpose. For instance, kitchens and bathrooms are usually used for their real-life purposes in LARPs. However, a classroom or a dining hall may be transformed into a ballroom, a nightclub, or a spaceship. An area is always reserved as a breakroom, which is called an OFF-space (see "Rules" for more information), which remains outside the scope of the LARP world. This is used for things like storing players' personal items, taking a break from the LARP, or as the GM's office.

Lastly and most importantly, the brief always involves going over the rules and techniques of simulation of the LARP. Rules help maintain safety and security during a LARP, as well as aid in understanding elements of the LARP performance. Depending on the content of the game, the GM will also discuss various techniques for the simulation of actions that are not physically possible (e.g. magic or superpowers) or are undesirable (e.g., violence). For instance, if the LARP will most likely involve action and battles, the GM will go through the rules of battle simulation. Most LARPers seem to know these rules and techniques very well, as they are similar in different LARPs, and games thus rarely involve any serious problems. I discuss the rules in detail in the next section.

In addition to the general brief, which is for all the players, GMs will often have quick briefs for individual characters or smaller groups, such as families or secret societies. These serve the same purpose as the general brief, but allow the discussion of themes that are not yet open for all players to know. The smaller briefs may also involve "secret" propping, such as body painting tattoos for a secret society.

> *As my character was a member of a witch clan, I had a short one-on-one brief with the GMs where they made sure I knew everything I needed to know about the secret society. I clarified my character's role in the clan, but didn't have any other questions so we did not discuss much. During the brief, I also got the clan's tattoo painted on my wrist with skin paints. The tattoo is secret and used by members of the clan to recognise one another. (Field note)*

7.2.3.1 Rules

In addition to state laws and rules imposed by the venue (e.g., no noise after a specific hour, no drinking), LARPs involve a number of self-imposed rules that the players are expected to follow. LARP rules are unwritten, but have become quite standard among LARPs in Finland. I learned the rules very quickly through attending LARPs and through hearing them repeated in briefs in a very clear and exhaustive manner. While all participants are expected to abide by and govern the rules, the GM usually has absolute control over the game. GMs commonly have a less active character, an NPC, or no character at all, which lets them observe and support the game, rather than be a part of it.

Rules can be general to LARP or may be game/venue specific. As an example of game-specific rules, LARPs that are expected to have many battles may impose a rule that characters cannot be killed during the LARP or may only be killed after a specific time (e.g., only after the LARP has been played for 4 hours). This does not mean that characters are immortal, but rather that players are not allowed to kill other characters in order to ensure that everyone has a good experience. There may also be different rules in terms of what to do if your character does die. Some LARPs may provide a new character or an NPC character, while in others the individual's LARP experience merely ends.

The more general rules incorporated into LARPs are used for safety as well as for clear structuring of the performance. LARPers are very serious about safety and security. Physically hurting or making another player feel uncomfortable is strictly prohibited and frowned upon. As LARPers want to prevent any types of accidents or other possible dangers, all participants are expected to follow rules strictly. The rules may seem strict and assume for GM to have rigid control of the game, but this rarely restricts the LARP in any perceivable way.

The following are some of the common LARP rules in southern Finland. (1) The beginning and end of a LARP are signalled by the GM, usually by shouting *"Game begins!"* and *"Game ends!"* (2) If, at any time during the LARP, a player is in danger or is hurt, individuals are to yell *"Hold!"* This can be done by any participant and signifies a pause in the game to figure out what has happened. (3) The players can also use safety words to signify to other players that they are uncomfortable with a situation in the LARP for any reason. The safety word is decided during briefing, but is usually *"turvasana"* (which is Finnish for *"safe word"*). A modification of the safe word is a technique of Street lights, where saying *"Green"* means I am ok with the situation, *"Yellow"* means I don't want the situation to progress any further, and *"Red"* means I want the situation to stop. Many other versions of this rule exist.

In addition to safety rules, LARP is guided by the strict division of "IN-game" and "OFF-game." The former refers to interaction as characters in the LARP world, while the latter refers to any interaction outside of the fantasy world done during the LARP. Being "OFF-game" or "being in OFF" can be used by anyone at any time, and is usually signalled by holding your fist over your head. LARPers prefer to stay IN-game throughout the LARP, as going OFF-game breaks up the game and one's performance in it. Therefore, LARPers tend to avoid going OFF-game in many situations.

Going OFF-game can, nevertheless, be useful or even necessary for a number a reasons. Firstly, OFF-game is used when dealing with practical issues during the LARP. The GM, LARPers, or NPCs may need to fix something or discuss organisational issues. As I noted earlier, the LARP space will usually have an OFF-space, in which lengthier discussions around such topics can take place.

Secondly, going OFF-game may be necessary for clarification of LARP-relevant information, between a LARPer and a GM or among LARPers. Players thus may go OFF-game to clarify rules and character information, or to make sure that everyone is on the same page both IN- and OFF-game. Here, the terms OFF- and IN-game can be used to describe characters, interaction, and the surrounding world during the LARP. Moreover, LARPers will start such interaction with saying "OFF-game" to signify interaction outside the scope of the fantasy performance. For instance if a player has stepped into a building and is not sure where the character now is, they might ask *"OFF-game: Where am I IN-game?"*

Thirdly, OFF-game can be used to give IN-game directions. Directions may be given by the GM or by any LARPer in order to explain things like a character's actions, environmental occurrences, or the general development of affairs. This is especially common for events that are difficult to re-create or are physically impossible. The instructions can be either spoken or take form in OFF-notes that can be attached to objects or be given to players. The GM may give directions to everyone in order to create drama, advance a storyline, and describe new events in the LARP world. The GM may also give directions to single players or smaller player groups to get them to react to new information. LARPers themselves have less say in the general LARP world, but often use this technique in character-specific ways, usually to explain actions that they do not want to or cannot perform physically (e.g., magic). Hope explains: *"OFF-game tells you what you are supposed to be doing in that situation. For example, I think it's really fun to be under a curse [laughs]. Spells are a really cool thing."* OFF-game may further be necessary for moving around in the space out of character. For instance, characters may need to travel, players whose characters have died may need to move around the LARP venue, or a LARPer may merely get tired and need to take a timeout.

7.2.3.2 Techniques for Simulation

As LARP is largely based on face-to-face interaction among individuals, the rules often incorporate techniques for certain common actions so as not to break a players' performance or pause the game for discussions. Such interaction is done through simulation, that is, mimicking actions in a manner predefined by the GM. Just as with the rules, LARPs can involve game-specific techniques and more common techniques that are used in almost all games. The two main common categories of simulating are combat and intimacy. Not all LARPs involve both or either, but most LARP briefs go through techniques of simulation just in case players run into such situations.

Combat covers many different types of battle and varies from game to game. It can include hand-to-hand combat, gunfire, sword fighting, and combat using magic. There are many different ways of simulating combat, which depend on

what fits the game best. Usually, no physical contact is allowed and movements need to be slowed down. For fire weapons, nothing is actually shot, but a signal, such as "Bang!" or "Shot!" is yelled by the player. The battle and its outcome are usually talked through and discussed by the LARPers OFF-game. Sometimes, if a LARP is expected to involve a lot of combat, the GM may incorporate a point system that reflects the experience and strength of the characters.

Intimacy is another aspect of LARP that may happen among characters, but is simulated by the players. Typically kissing is simulated by holding up your hand against another player's hand and kissing the back of your own hand. Sex is normally merely discussed by the LARPers OFF-game. However, some games may involve more physical ways of simulating intimacy, such as rubbing each others' shoulders. In addition, LARPers playing characters in intimate relationships tend to discuss their limits before the game during contacting. The players decide themselves whether they are ok with things like holding hands or hugging.

In addition to elements that may be too dangerous or uncomfortable to perform realistically, LARPs may incorporate elements that are impossible for LARPers to do. These may include things like speaking foreign languages or performing magic. Such elements are usually very game-specific and have game-specific simulation or rules. For instance, speaking a foreign language may be signified by a hand signal, such as holding up crossed fingers.

7.2.4 IN-Game

The LARP game itself has quite a flowing, emergent, and free form. The game starts as the GM shouts *"Game begins!"* with the LARPers beginning their game in a pre-decided place. LARPers often describe the beginning of the performance to be *"difficult"* (Hope), *"scary"* (Hope) and "*nerve wrecking"* (Rose), as even with preparation you can never be fully be sure how the character will come to life. *"At least you sort of know how it goes so you have the guts to do it…but you still get the butterflies,"* Rose consoles herself. Individuals are always nervous about diving into a fantasy context, as it is new every time. LARPing continuously provides its participants with novelty and challenge, as themes of games, performed characters, and the set of co-performers is different every time. LARPers embrace this aspect enthusiastically and actively want to try out different types of characters and different types of LARPs in order to broaden their perspectives. *"If you would always play the same thing, it would get really boring,"* Wade explains.

As I showed in the previous sections, LARP does involve extensive preparation. However, to take the final step into the fantasy world and the fantasy character, LARPers have to *"plunge into the character"* (Rose). When attending a LARP for the first time and asking for tips on performing my character, I was told that *"it's best not to think about and just dive in"* (Field note). This reflects Chekhov's (1995) ideas, who stressed that actors need to make an imaginative leap into fantasy to interact with the aesthetic performance and create powerful aesthetic work. Entering a fantasy world is like diving into the unknown.

The beginning of a LARP is always a bit stiff and slow, as LARPers can take a lot of time to get into the world and into their characters fully. A discussion with Dawn exemplifies this:

> *Interviewer: What does it feel like when the game is starting out?*
>
> *Dawn: Well sometimes it's quite difficult. And in many games there is a type of initial stiffness because people have not really got into their characters yet…it's like "cough, cough", we need to…somehow get over this…*
>
> *Interviewer: So what do you do to get over it? What kinds of things do you do?*
>
> *Dawn: Well, it's usually a really awkward silent moment, and the characters are just like, well now we're just standing here. So you just try to think what the character is thinking…like are they pissed off at the situation or would they try to begin a conversation or would they just leave. Like just really try to get into the character's mind and continue from there with actions.*

Getting fully into one's character involves a very conscious process of negotiation, which I discuss in more detail in Chapter 8.

The GM tends to have a rough schedule for when the game starts and ends, as well as possible elements that they want to throw in to keep the LARP going or to create drama. However, there are no specific plotlines or a strict script that the LARP follows. Moreover, while LARPers prepare for the character, they rarely actually plan in detail what they will do or what will happen in the game. Therefore, while there is a starting point to the LARP, the world comes to life through LARPers' interaction that is based around their characters, contacts, and aims for the game. This reflects Stanislavski's idea of imagination, which he saw to be a process of piecing together the imperfections of the text that works as the basis for the aesthetic performance (Pitches 2006).

Performing the LARP character and world requires continuous attention to one's own behaviour and reactions, which results in LARPers being more consciously aware of themselves, other people, and the context they are in. *"It's sort of like you're really focused on what you're doing and focused as a person … you really notice the surrounding world and such,"* says Rose. This awareness is simultaneously bodily, emotional, and cognitive. I delve into the topic further in the following chapters.

LARPs tend to involve interaction that easily goes to extremes and becomes over-dramatised, creating experiences that are *"much more interesting than everyday life" (Peg)*. LARPs are also often quite physically active and action-packed, as they involve a lot of running around and simulation of battles. Chase explains that LARPs often consist of *"running around in the forest, and then getting your legs all bruised up cos you stumble on a rock or something."*

LARPs are not competitive, as, most of the time, they cannot be won in any way. In fact, most LARPers like to *"play to lose,"* that is, play with an aim for an outcome that results in more drama and more interesting plot twists in the game, rather than favourable consequences for their character. LARPers also aim to always support one another in interaction. Wade elaborates that *"if others want to do*

something that involves your character, you always try to go along…you can't really brush off another's idea."

The LARP usually ends at a predetermined time or with a certain event, which is expected to happen or is invoked by the GM. For instance, this can be some sort of a ritual, a speech, or a death of a character. GMs often also give a heads up to players that the game will soon end so that they have time to wrap up interesting plotlines and interactions. Most games end at the same time for all players when the GM informs of it by shouting *"Game ends!"* Some LARPs do have a more gradual or unstructured ending. For instance, a game may end when people go to bed or when they choose to leave the game area.

7.2.5 After the Game

Because of the active attention to behaviour and the fact that LARPs tend to be physically active, the events are much more intense and energy draining than similar interactions in everyday life. Individuals are thus often physically and emotionally tired after the LARP. Dot explains: *"you're so excited all the time, and you prepare and then you put in so much effort and then I'm always like dying of hunger because you just use up* so *much energy during a LARP day."* Rose adds that *"I just get so physically tired…and then I also get emotionally tired."*

Returning to the everyday self and real life from the LARP world is experienced by LARPers to be very abrupt, harsh, and almost disenchanting. It is thus very different from the gradual process of getting into character, which requires time and effort from the LARPer. The return to reality is a much faster process, as the elements are familiar and do not require conscious control.

The fantasy dissolves through the shared understanding that the LARP is over and that its world is no longer real or serious. Rose describes it in the following way: *"In many games it feels like the game just sort of ends abruptly. And the you're just like 'oh...'"* When I have attended LARPs, I have noticed a distinct change in people's attitude and behaviour the moment the LARP ends. Individuals visibly fall back to their ordinary posture, way of talking, or mood. The abrupt end is often very emotional for LARPers. Rose explains that the end of a LARP feels especially disenchanting if you were *"just getting your thing on the way and then the game ends. And then you're just like 'but, but, my goal is not finished!'"* Moreover, as I will show in the following paragraphs, elements of the character and fantasy world may stick to the LARPer even after the game ends. Individuals become intensely nostalgic about a world and a character they know they cannot return to.

> *Dawn: When you come back to the real world after a game, now that's a challenge. […] when you're in character for many hours or even many days, you live in that world, it's so weird coming back…to normal people.*

The ending of a LARP is also seen in depropping, which is the LARP term for the process of changing from character clothes to normal everyday apparel. Unlike propping, depropping is not ritualised or centralised, as it does not build up

to anything. Depropping tends to be more individual and unstructured than its counterpart. Some LARPers may change their clothes before or gradually during the formal and informal discussions that are the central part of the after-LARP performance.

LARPers usually linger at the venue after the LARP ends to discuss and debrief, a process I describe a little later. Everyone also helps to deprop and clean up the space. If the venue is close to LARPers' homes and the game ends early, players may leave the same night. As games usually end quite late, people tend to stay the night and leave for home the next morning. On the way back, conversation tends to be less lively than on the way to LARPs, as people are very tired, but some discussions do usually continue.

7.2.5.1 Debrief

The abrupt change created by the end of the LARP and its emotional impact on the LARPers is often alleviated by discussing the game events with other players both formally and informally. Individuals are very enthusiastic about discussing the game and spend time together at the LARP venue after the game has ended, even though they are often physically and emotionally drained. Discussions begin in the form of a debrief, which is the most formal part of the LARP after it has ended. Debrief is a LARP term that refers to the wrap-up of the LARP that aims for all LARPers to gain a full understanding of what happened in the game through uncovering the plotlines and relationships, as well as presenting every player's point of view on the performance.

A debrief can be seen as the counterpart of the brief, but is less of an account from the GM and more of a collaboration and discussion among all LARPers. The brief and debrief seem to create an entity of holistic understanding of the LARP world and the interactions that happen within it. Briefing happens before the game and creates a shared perspective for a starting point for the LARP. The debriefing then wraps up the game by explaining fully and presenting multiple perspectives on the events that happened during the LARP.

> *Wade: After the game you tell everyone what you did…and I often like to ask about motivations from some people is they like shoot us and I wanna know why they did that. Or some secrets that you don't find out in the game […] Stuff that didn't come up or wasn't clear or your character didn't want to do. I think it's always really fun to ask other and often I really wanna tell others even if they don't want to listen [laughs]. I've noticed I have a really bad habit to just go on and on about game stuff. But somehow I think it's a part of the experience.*

Debrief does not in itself work as a way of getting out of the character. Depropping and debriefing, however, help in letting go of the character, its mindset and mannerisms, and returning to one's "real" self. Moreover, *"debriefing becomes almost therapeutic, as it helps you to deal with the emotional rollercoaster that the character has gone through" (Field note).* It is especially important to disengage from a character as quickly as possible if a LARPer played an emotionally difficult character or had an emotionally difficult game. For example, May described playing a

mentally ill character, which was very interesting for her, but many of its characteristics felt like they could have been harmful if she had held onto them for a longer period of time.

> *May: As soon as possible, I wanted to shake off the character out of my head. Even though it was fun to play, I don't want to keep it in my head after the game. It is fun to talk about the events of the game and stuff like that, but most likely I couldn't be in any way in character because it was such an intense game.*

In practice, debriefing is managed through many different forms, varying much more from game to game than briefing. Most commonly, the GM first shares general plotlines that they had written for the game in the form of character goals, as well as gives an overview of the game as they saw it. This is followed by the players' own accounts of the game. In smaller games, every person tends to give the whole group a lengthier personal debrief. In larger games, this may be limited in time to a few minutes. In very large games, people tend to be divided into groups for debriefs. In games with clear groupings, debriefs may be done in groups in front of the crowd.

Debriefing is a very important part of LARPing for several reasons. Firstly, debriefing allows LARPers to share, reflect on, and better understand their own experiences and emotions as their character in the LARP. In their narratives, LARPers often share a little of their character's background, the main goals for the LARP, the main events that happened to their character, and personal highlights in the game. People really enjoy sharing their experiences with the other LARPers, and can talk endlessly about what they did and what happened to them as the character. LARPs usually result in very strong emotions, and LARPers have a need to release these and share them with individuals that played important people in their character's life.

> *Rose: You get to break down your character and tell everyone else all the fun things that happened to you and what experiences and emotions you had. When you have that intense feeling and you get a high curve of this awesome feeling and then you hit a low or a feeling of emptiness. And then if you go through it together, what just happened, then it sort of clears that out. So the final breakdown is really important.*

Secondly, the debrief allows LARPers to hear and better understand the experiences, motivations, and perspectives of others. This gives insight into other people's game and views, allowing LARPers a greater understanding of how their actions influenced and were perceived by others. This way, players receive feedback on their actions and the portrayal of the character, possibly learning something that they can use to improve future LARP performances or even their day-to-day interaction. Moreover, the debrief covers the events that the character had no connection with or no knowledge of during the LARP, creating a bird's eye view of the whole event of the LARP. Peg explains: *"All these new things are always revealed and it's really fun to hear about them because things are clarified. Meaning what happened in the game. Because you only get to follow your own game."*

I have noticed from attending various LARPs that LARPers are often most enthusiastic about sharing the various mishaps, embarrassments, and misfortunes that happened to their character. These are presented in a very humorous light for everyone to laugh and make fun of. The mishaps include both unplanned failures of the player (e.g. misunderstanding a goal or someone's instructions) and the intentional failures of the character (e.g. embarrasses oneself in front of a crowd). LARPers easily mock and jeer at both their own and others characters as well as at the encounters they had with one another during the LARP. This mocking seems to create a distance between the self and the character, as well as the fantasy world and the real world, aiding LARPers revert to their everyday life and everyday self. Moreover, it may alleviate any negative emotions that were created in intense encounters during the LARP.

In addition to the general, formal debrief, most LARPers also debrief in smaller groups and one-on-one with the players of characters they had most interaction with, getting to know others' thoughts and motivations both as a character and a player. These tend to be longer and more informal discussions that happen in the form of casual hanging out at the LARP venue or even after the whole event.

> *We talked about the game in smaller groups into the night. There was a lot of hubbub and everyone just yelled over one another all the stuff that happened to them, focusing on funny and emotion things, and things they shared with her or were central to their character. We didn't go to sleep until about 2 am. (Field note)*

An emotional closeness is often created among people that play close characters, and people feel a need to express that to one another through more personal, one-on-one debriefs. This allows LARPers to share their experiences and emotions, reflecting on them on a deeper level. More specifically, it allows people to set straight issues that were left unclear, sort out misunderstandings, as well as resolve anxieties that may have arisen during the game. The debrief helps understand what happened from a multitude of perspectives, and gives more meaning to the experiences.

All in all, debriefs allows LARPers to compare experiences, combining them into a holistic understanding of the LARP's events and the various characters' points of view. This allows individuals to understand and deal with their experiences both in the first and third person. As Rose puts it, *"the debrief helps release everything, as at the same time everyone else tells things and then I do."* The result is the possibility that everyday life does not allow us: knowing everything that happened during the temporal and spatial performance that makes up the LARP, tying together all the characters, their relationships, goals, and events.

7.2.5.2 Gaining Experiences

LARPers tend to have *"strong emotions and experiences"* (Dawn) as a result of the fantasy performance. LARPers are thrilled about *"experiencing new things"* (Peg) and *"experiencing different emotions"* (Dawn) as they enter new worlds with every LARP

performance. In discussions after the games, it became apparent to me that LARPers find these resultant emotions, interactions, and experiences to be the most valuable elements of a LARP. I explore and break down the performance of LARP itself in detail in Chapters 8 and 9.

Most of the time, LARPs result in positive experiences for the participants, which LARPers cherish and learn from. However, negative experiences are also possible. Small breaks in performance can happen when individuals are distracted, unprepared, or unfocused for some reason. This may be caused by the lack of rules or clarity of context, poor or distracting propping, other people being OFF-game, or merely the LARPer him- or herself being tired and hungry. Long or continued breaks in performance can seriously affect an individual's experience, as they can cause one to *"go too much into yourself"* (Rose) and thus lose the embodiment of the character and connection to the fantasy world being performed.

Negative overall experiences are usually a result of LARP elements poorly fitting one another and not emerging as a consistent entity. This can be a result of various processes, both stemming from the LARP design and the players themselves. As seen in Wade's example below, game design can produce a bad experience through such elements, as a poorly structured network, short contact lists, and incompatible or nonexistent character goals. When characters have nothing to do and have no materials to base active engagement on, players get bored.

> *Wade: [Describing a recent prison-themed LARP he had attended] I got really annoyed at some point…there was a clear problem, like there were a few characters that were clearly redundant and they had no function there. Like I was just hanging out with five other prisoners, or four other prisoners and a guard, in this tiny cell the whole game basically. […] And you could see that…or one guy said right after the game that he had a shit time and another one said later on that he had a shit time. Many people seemed to have a pretty bad game. […] We told the gamemasters that we could have done other things during the game or like play contacts, which were missing.*

At the same time, LARPers themselves have an enormous role in creating a good experience for themselves and for one another. Negative experiences can be a result of contacts that are too passive or too engaged in other goals, as well as players not being supportive of and open to one another. For example, in one LARP a central contact of the character I was playing became too caught up in another goal, leaving me with nothing to do. In another LARP, I found that I was in a similar situation when my character reached her goals too quickly, as other players, whose characters were supposed to impede my progress, played their characters in a too lenient and kind manner.

Negative experiences can, nevertheless, be interesting to LARPers, as they still present a new perspective and a break from everyday life. In a discussion on the way from a LARP, a LARPer pointed out to me that he actually enjoys having a really poor game once in a while, as it puts LARPing into perspective and makes the positive experiences even better. Through the positive and negative experiences within LARPs, LARPers learn what works and what does not work, what is fun and what is not fun, allowing them to develop their own future performances.

7.3 After the LARP Event

When a LARP ends, individuals are faced with returning to their everyday lives, which is often described by LARPers as difficult and boring. Possibly as a way of holding on to the LARP world, debriefing usually continues for a while over email and social media, reminiscing and delving into how characters may develop after the events of the game. After the event, the GMs also usually ask for a small written debrief from everyone to get feedback on the game's organisation as well as to get to know how the characters came to life. Peg, who has organised several large LARPs herself, elaborates that *"it's nice to hear whether people had a good time […] and there's usually so much stuff that you didn't even think of planning that just* happens. *And you're like wow! Cool!"*

As LARPs tend to be both physically and socially draining, LARPers often describe needing a day off to sleep and relax after a game. Rose elaborates:

> *Rose: [The LARP] was on Saturday so the next day was a Sunday and a day off. And on Sunday I was just thinking about the previous day, happily, like that was a lot of fun. But definitely it was physically very good that I got to sleep on Sunday. And it's so social that I need quiet me time to get back from all the social hassle.*

Most games are organised on weekends or during holidays, and thus getting time off can be easily arranged. However, some of my interviewees have described taking a day or two off work with very taxing LARPs, especially ones they helped organise.

As they return to their everyday selves and lives, many LARPers experience various levels of what they call *"Post-LARP Depression,"* or PLD for short. This is not a very descriptive term, as it is, of course, not actual depression or a post-traumatic disorder, but could be rather described as a bittersweet feeling of nostalgia for the LARP. PLD is a very complex and self-contradicting phenomenon that emerges as eagerness and excitement over the LARP, as well as longing for it. Moreover, LARPers seem to simultaneously enjoy and dread PLD. Dawn describes PLD as *"a horrible feeling of this strong need to LARP and continue the game. You continue thinking about the game and how much fun you had and about the great feeling you have still even though you're like 'on no! Why did the game end?!"* PLD is driven by a wish to go back to the fantasy world and the fantasy character, and continue playing out themes of the LARP. At the same time, LARPers say that they would not actually want to live in the LARP world as it is not real, and the characters in them often have a difficult life.

In the light of PLD, individuals also feel nostalgic for the ephemeral community, its closeness and intensity. They miss the face-to-face contact with and support of other people. *"LARPer groups get really tightly knit and then all of a sudden you have to go home after [the game is over], and it's a horrible feeling,"* says Sue. LARPers also often feel that their *"real life is so boring and mundane"* (Dawn), as it is not as dramatic, exciting, and detailed as the one within LARP. Their life also feels confusing, and they often wish to have the clear goals and rules that the LARP provides them with.

> *After the game, one of the LARPers explained that the best thing about characters' lives over her own is the fact that they have really clear problems and really clear wishes and goals. Their emotions and attitudes come as given and they don't need to be figured out. She says she sometimes wishes real life were like that. (Field note)*

Although PLD seems as if it is a negative element, many LARPers believe that "PLD is a sign that you had a really good game" (Dawn). Dawn continues: *"…it's an excitedly longing feeling. You're like no! Why did this end?! It was so great! And then you're like…just waiting for the next game."* PLD often becomes one of the central elements driving individuals to continuously return to LARPing.

PLD varies from individual to individual, and LARP experience to LARP experience. Dawn explains that the strength of the PLD does not especially depend on the themes or length of the LARP, but rather on *"the intensity of the character, I mean like how you play that character. If it's really great and gripping, then it easily sticks to you."* This sometimes emerges as various bodily and emotional elements of the character adhering to the individual for some time after the LARP is over.

PLD seems to be tied into intense emotional experiences as well as elements of the character spilling over from the LARP into individuals' own lives. PLD may also be stronger if the character's life is somehow preferable to one's own, as Dot explains below.

> *Dot: I always get PLD. Especially if the character has somehow a better life situation that myself. Like if I'm in exam season and they're not…or like they're the types of people in whose skin I'd like to be for a little while…you somehow miss that.*

Wade further points out that *"[PLD] is more pronounced in people whose lives aren't going that well. Or that's how I've experienced it."* Therefore, the LARPer's own life situation has an influence on the intensity of PLD. I elaborate on these themes in the next chapter.

LARPers themselves discuss various ways of overcoming or preventing PLD. In the short-term, PLD can be alleviated through debriefing and learning to keep the character at a distance. In the long-term, many LARPers have found that organising their real life to be interesting and exciting is the ultimate solution to PLD, because PLD is often stronger when one's own life is not perceived as interesting. LARPers have even pointed out that experiencing PLD has urged them to change things in their life in order to make it more interesting.

> *Rose: This time I had less of [PLD] than I usually have...I think it's because I'm in quite a fresh relationship and so a couple of days away from my boyfriend kind of made me miss him so it was really nice seeing him. It wasn't like 'oh, life is wonderful in that other world and not I have to go home alone'. It wasn't like that. I feel like my everyday is also a little exciting, not like routines, but that it has all sorts of drama in it. It's not that big of a drop to everyday life.*

8 LEVELS OF FANTASY PERFORMANCE

Following my experiences and the interviewees' descriptions of the context, a successful LARP performance experience requires, firstly, active and reactive participants that prepare well, take the fantasy world seriously, and are able to step out of their own boundaries. Secondly, the performance needs an open community that supports one another and creates the experience together. Thirdly, for the LARP performance to work, it needs a good framework of rules and relationships that build up a social network. Together, the individuals, the interaction, and the social space create a clear and wholesome experience for all the participants. This is supported by material elements of the performance. The experience of such performance is often strong, emotional, and eye opening in some way to the individuals.

In the following sections, I will focus on the performance of fantasy that occurs as individuals engage in a LARP. I examine the performance of fantasy as it emerges on three levels of abstraction (following Goffman 1959), that is, the performance of one's self, the performance of interaction with others, and the performance of the social space. In practice, the performances are not as clearly separated, but flow in and out of one another. Each of the three sections includes both findings and discussion. This is followed by an overall discussions section, in which I connect the ideas of this chapter together to present how fantasy is performed by individuals.

8.1 The Self in Fantasy Performance

The central characteristic of a LARP performance is taking on the perspective of the character that one is portraying. The various aspects of this character are always different to some extent from one's self and need to be continuously negotiated. While embodied, the experience of performing a fantasy character is a very conscious and reflexive process, which requires continuous concentration, awareness, and attention to both the character and the self.

In this section, I explore in detail the performance of the self and the character in the context of fantasy performance that emerges in LARP. I describe how LARPers build up and perform their fantasy character. Moreover, I show that keeping the self and character apart becomes a central aspect of the performance,

which allows learning to take place. I conclude this section with a discussion of how the self and the character are negotiated by individuals within fantasy performance.

8.1.1 Building up the Fantasy Character

As I described in the previous chapter, individuals prepare extensively for LARPs, which supports and builds the performance of the character during the actual LARP. The preparation that occurs before the LARP event involves material, bodily, and cognitive elements. The material elements include objects that create the character's visual appearance or that the character owns. These are prepared by making props. Bodily elements include things like the character's physical mannerisms, habits, and behaviours, while cognitive aspects involve beliefs, personality, and various points of view. All of these tend to be based on archetypes, stereotypes, and clichés, which are often borrowed from popular culture. LARPers' performances tend to accentuate these, as they are easy to grasp, portray, and understand.

The character is initiated through a basis in concrete and clearly defined characteristics that the player receives beforehand. Hope explains how these aspects help begin the LARP performance:

> *Hope: Props and other things really affect it, because then when you look at yourself in the mirror, you don't see yourself, but you see the character and you get this feeling, that hey! I'm the character, not me and I need to think like this…*

Bodily and material aspects support the character performance "*because they create the atmosphere"* (Peg). In the same vein, Walton (1990) has suggested that various physical elements can help "prompt," "coordinate," and "enrich imagined lives" (p. 21). In LARPing, embracing another's body and characteristics creates a very approachable feel of the character, making them feel more real through their tangibility. As Rose puts it, *"it's taking on the entity of how that person is that character."*

Props and characteristics of a character create what Goffman (1974) described as a personal front, that is, the character's appearance and manner. Belk and Costa (1995) noticed a similar occurrence in the context of the fur rendezvous re-enactment, proposing that this means "'fronts' are easier to maintain and that consumer 'props' are more important to role enactment" (p. 231). The material and bodily elements do indeed become a LARPer's tools for changing the body physically and getting into the character. However, LARPers stress that the physical props are never central to the performance itself. A common saying among LARPers goes: *"Propping for LARPs, not LARPing for props."* The front can help keep the character embodied and grounded, but its role is merely supportive, as it never creates the character on its own. May elaborates:

> *May: Of course the props help and all those other things […] but I would say the primary place where you develop the character is in your head. And that's what's great about LARPs! It doesn't*

> *matter that you don't have the magic wand that looks exactly authentic, or a sword that looks exactly real. They're just the tools you play with. The real game is in your head.*

Just as May describes, LARPers need the material and bodily characteristics to support the performance, but it also requires the individual to *"get into the character's head"* (Peg). Peg elaborates that "*If you are able to understand this character and the logic through which they act… when you think through the character's thoughts, then you can immerse into it."* To understand their characters better, LARPers try to imagine how it is to live in the character's context, with their goals and values. Rose explains: *"When I try to immerse into the character, I try to somehow think what their life was like."* The character thus *"comes to be through you"* (Rose), as you build on, develop, and analyse the given materials.

LARPers nevertheless often approach the process of getting into character on a more cognitive and emotional level through bodily aspects of performance that allow them to take on the character's particular mindset. Wade gives an example: *"Like you can get yourself nervous if you sort of breathe in a shallow way. Some people can also get themselves to cry."* Hope explains that *"your whole body is a part of [the performance]."* Wade continues that bodily reactions can also be a side-effect of cognitively taking on the character:

> *Wade: One time I had this character that was a junkie and he couldn't get a fix so he was just climbing on walls and I actually started feeling nauseous at some point [of the LARP]. And I got other physical reactions at some point. It was kind of freaky when my hands were all shaking after the game […] You can definitely psych yourself to do physical things.*

These findings are in line with Ratcliffe's (2008) theorisation that emotions are simultaneously bodily and cognitive.

All in all, LARPers prepare for their characters by propping, taking on bodily elements, and getting into the mindset. The clarity of everyone's fantasy character is ensured through the practice of individual and communal briefing, which I described earlier. Briefing could be seen as an extreme form of frame alignment (Goffman 1959), the role of which is to provide clear information that better defines the situation an individual is in. However, as I have already noted, the characters only fully come to life through the context of the LARP, as they are performed and as LARPers interact with one another. LARPers only fully understands what their character is like and how they behave as they perform them. This often leads to unexpected results, or, as Rose puts it, *"completely different entities than I expected"*. Peg develops this idea: *"LARPing makes the world alive and it develops and extends the character…and you might get to know the character in a completely different light than what you first thought."* This coincides with Butler's (1990, 2004) ideas of identity not preceding its performance, but rather emerging only as it is performed. I turn to this performance next.

8.1.2 Performing a Fantasy Character

LARPers describe the experience of performing the character being like "*a new perspective that is taken on"* (May), a "*different perspective"* (Peg, Dawn), *"a new point of view"* (Wade, Rose), or a *"different mood"* (Dot). The aim is to think, act, and react as the character would through *"applying the frame"* (Hope) that you get in the form of the character. This frame *"puts certain guides in place"* (Dot), which direct your actions and patterns of thought, limiting, but also freeing them in different ways. The character is embodied in all its bodily, emotional, and cognitive aspects, but also continuously monitored and reflected on by the LARPer.

LARPers point out that, at first, performing the character can be *"difficult"* and *"testing"* (Dot), as it requires LARPers to suddenly perform only the characteristics, behaviours, and reactions of their character.

> *Hope: You are pretending to be another character and […] you get do something different from what you would normally do. So then you don't know those limits naturally […]You just sort of have to be like, I'm the character and this is how I'm supposed to think."*

The performance of the LARP character emerges through the continuous and conscious management of all the necessary information, such as the character's opinions, morals, ideals, and norms, as well as the control of all necessary responses, both physical and emotional.

As the LARP progresses, the fantasy character becomes clearer and more natural through its performance. Rose exemplifies this:

> *Rose: As the evening went forward and you got more into the character, it's interesting that it kind of found its own identity which ends up in a certain way…like I myself realised at some point [of the LARP] that ok, now Grace [a character] is like this and this is how she ended up in this situation.*

Even as the character *"comes to life"* (Rose), LARPers continue to be very intensely focused on what they are doing, always aware of the actions and characteristics they are portraying: *"you sort of always know that it's a different world"* (Rose). As I will explain later, LARPers are very adamant about keeping the self and the character apart. Moreover, some characteristics can never be fully naturalised. For example, in one LARP I played an English character that had travelled to Finland and could not speak Finnish. The techniques used for language were very simple: English was used for English and Finnish was used for Finnish. However, as I speak Finnish, I had to consciously pretend not to understand any discussions going on among characters speaking the language IN-game. Similarly, physically impossible characteristics, such as superpowers, cannot be naturalised.

LARPers never reach the state of flow, which is characterised by intense and focused concentration on what one is doing, merging of action and awareness, loss of reflective self-consciousness, a sense of control over one's actions, distortion of temporal experience, and the experience of activity as intrinsically rewarding (Csikszentmihalyi 1990; Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi 2002). While LARPers do feel in control, concentrate fully, find their experiences intrinsically rewarding, and possibly have distorted experiences of time, they are nevertheless

continuously aware of their actions and reflect on their self. Schechner (1988) has similarly pointed out that flow does not have a place in aesthetic performance, as it is constantly interrupted by reflexivity. Such reflexivity can be seen in the excerpt below:

> *Rose: I think the more the game goes forward the more Rose and the character become intertwined. Then I have to dig up some facts from the character's history which I've been learning by heart last night, and then Rose might make a comment that echoes in the character's head…so the metaplaying becomes almost a part of the character. I would say that's when you're in character. But you can never fully be someone else.*

In LARP performance, individuals are constantly engaged in a process that they call metaplaying, an emic term, which involves being very "*conscious of one's self and environment"* (Wade). Metaplaying entails being aware of, negotiating information on, and having perceptions of both the everyday self and the character, as well as the everyday and fantasy context. Some of the ways that LARPers describe metaplaying is *"multitasking"* (Rose), *"filtering"* (Wade), and *"selectively noticing"* (Hope) elements. Wade explains: *"There is a sort of filter between your thoughts in that world and your own thoughts, so like you are conscious of the fact that the camping sight is not really a Ukrainian prison or settlement or whatever it was."* Rose elaborates that *"it's like focusing on something, but simultaneously acknowledging everything that is around you."* She further describes her experience of negotiating her self and her character in a LARP where her character, an ambitious reporter, died and was left in limbo to be judged by her peers:

> *Rose: There was an interesting situation when the minister character… he started telling us that we're in limbo and we should think about what we have done…and my character was a complete atheist, she was like, yeah, this is not possible at all. Sort of…Rose was also there at the back of my mind laughing at the situation, because I would be thinking the completely opposite. […] I had a bit of a reaction like I don't know if I wanna go along with this, but I did not jump too much into myself because the character was thinking all the time that there's something interesting going on and she's there to do a story…so it was easy to take on the situation through the character.*

Metaplay is used to keep the self and the character apart, as well as for negotiating LARP rules and structures, such as the OFF-game information and IN-game information that their character does not know.

The term metaplay is sometimes used by LARPers with a negative connotation in referring to individuals using information not known to the character of the LARP in order to advance one's goals. This then becomes an intentional break of the negotiation I described above, which is shunned by the LARP community. Most LARPers seem, nevertheless, to use the term as I described it earlier and I will therefore continue to use that understanding of it.

It becomes evident that the exact opposite of flow takes place during a LARP performance, as individuals become extremely aware of their self, their body, and their actions. This supports my earlier suggestion stemming from the literature on nostalgia and Utopia (Armitt 1996; Dolan 2005; Schroeder and Borgerson 2003;

Higson 2014) that, rather than escaping reality, the aim of fantasy performance may be escaping the here and now, that is, normalised temporality. The fantasy performance interrupts and creates a rift in lived time, resulting in the experience of explicit time (Fuchs 2010), which results in a doubleness of the body that is both lived and reflected on (Wyllie 2005). Consequently, while the performance of LARP is distinctly bodily, it is not implicitly embodied, as the performance is explicitly reflexive. Moreover, unlike the implications made by Fuchs (2010) and Wyllie (2005), the explicit temporality of fantasy does not result in a performance that is fragmented or out of touch with its past and future. Fantasy performance is an explicitly and strictly synthesised experience through its basis in clearly negotiated structures.

The conscious reflection taking place during the LARP performance requires individuals to either push and challenge their limits, or, in contrast, to restrain and hold themselves back. As Rose's example showed, the fantasy performance can result in reactions or emotions in the LARPer that do not correspond with the character and these therefore have to be continuously negotiated. In continuing her description of the same LARP, Rose explains that her character needed to make decisions that would be harmful to other characters. This would, in her everyday life, go against her strong Christian morals.

> *Rose: So you're like how am I supposed to react to this? A little bit differently in this game that I would personally react... You think about everything through the character. […] Like I knew the situation and how I felt. But then I also knew that as the character I could not accept that view. It's interesting…this relationship between me and the character.*

Both pushing and holding yourself back can be extremely challenging for individuals. Rose continues that *"if I have to be a character that is really clever and witty and reacts really fast and stuff like that, and then like they're leading the whole thing…I can't do that."* On the other hand, in discussions after games, LARPers have often pointed out that holding back their self to be far more difficult. *"It is easy to exaggerate"* (Hope), but it can be quite challenging to *"learn to operate in new limits and express yourself in a completely new way"* (Hope). Limiting performance requires *"more thinking beforehand, as it requires a lot of … acknowledging things that I might do that like the character would never do and leaving them out"* (Wade).

Pushing and holding back the self can take place both on a bodily and social level. In terms of bodily characteristics, individuals may take on the lives of characters that lack their physical disabilities, such as blindness or a speech impediment, or may gain new abilities, such as speaking another language or sprouting wings and flying. For example, Sue, who is visually impaired, often LARPs characters that can see normally: *"Katie could see normally so I could see IN-game."* Individuals often also need to push or hold themselves back socially, such as how they present themselves, what their character finds acceptable to do or say, and what status their character takes on in the performed society. Dot points out: *"The status of your character is everything! Like it guides how you hold yourself and what you do."* Many characteristics, such as gender, fall between the two levels. Below, Rose describes

crossplaying, which is a term for performing a character of a different gender than one's own. This involved both elaborate propping and mental preparation.

> *Rose: It's a really different character. But it's really easy in that environment, or like I very strongly identify as a woman, so it's not like … I know some people feel to be of a different gender and like to play characters like that, but I just want to immerse into that body language… like what the character could hold in itself. Because being a different gender is so different.*

To summarise, a character comes to life in the fantasy performance through taking on various aspects of that character. However, individuals never reach a state of flow, but continuously reflect on their performance through metaplay, the conscious negotiation of the everyday self and the character. The performance thus disrupts lived time, causing performers to experience time and their bodies explicitly. Performance of a fantasy character requires individuals to push themselves or hold themselves back, which can occur both on a bodily and a social level. Next, I delve more deeply into the negotiation of the self and the character.

8.1.3 Keeping the Self and the Character Apart

A LARP performance entails taking on another's skin, but *"of course you yourself are always somehow present"* (Peg). LARPers describe the experience of performing the LARP entailing neither being their own self, nor being the character that they are portraying in the LARP. It is necessary to experience and feel the things the character is doing, but not fully become the character, as this would lead to disillusion or insanity. At the same time, LARPing requires being more aware and conscious of one's self and one's surroundings, which means participants cannot fully be their "real" selves either. "*Your own persona is there the whole time [when you're LARPing]. You can't fully go into the character. You just need to somehow take an attitude that I am not me anymore"* (Chase). This supports the idea that a LARP performance involves the experience of explicit time (Fuchs 2010).

LARPers stress that the experiences and emotions that take place during the LARP are felt by them, but are not theirs. Sue explains: *"...so if the character is crying then you're like hey, these feelings are the character's and the attitudes to different things stem from that, and they're not my own things"*. However, as Peg points out, LARPers also need to *"immerse enough to feel the emotions that the character is feeling."* In a discussion immediately before a LARP, a LARPer put these two ideas together: *"LARP does not involve your feelings, they are the character's. But you get to feel them…and they can be really strong!"* Individuals experience and feel what the character goes through, but also consciously distance themselves from these performances.

LARPers make the conscious effort to discern the character from the self and keep a distance between them. *"It's important to distinguish which thoughts are the character's and which thoughts are your own,"* says Peg. LARPers further tend to encourage one another to speak of the character in the third person, and never in the first person when the LARP is over: "*after the game it's important to talk about like* she *did this and* she *did that"* (Sue). This helps keep the emotions, attitudes, and responses

of a character *with* the character and at a safe distance. Otherwise, the game *"can get very heavy and difficult"* (May). Failure to discern self and character can result in disillusion, disenchantment, and, in the worst case, negative experiences or emotions, such as fear, grief, and stress. The character and the self can become confused during the LARP performance, with emotions, actions, and experiences leaking, that is, partially or fully transferring, to one another. When referring to this, LARPers themselves sometimes also talk about *"bleed"* between the LARP and real life.

Bleed can happen in either direction: from self to character, or from character to self. On the one hand, personal characteristics, mannerisms, and emotions may leak into the character in the form of reactions that are not true to the character. Hope had such an experience when LARPing a character called Samuel. *"Sometimes it felt like I could have made him more different. Like somehow there were too many of my own characteristics. There was too much similarity. Like sometimes I would just see just myself, and no Samuel."* Hope's experience highlights the need for both the self and the character to be present in the performance in a balanced way. If the character becomes too similar to one's self, the experiences become boring for the individual playing the character, and the emotions can become too personal.

On the other hand, as the character becomes somewhat natural to the LARPer throughout the duration of the LARP, some of its characteristics can leak into the player's own life. A leak can, for instance, include emotional and cognitive aspects (e.g., a character's mood, mindset, or experiences during the game), bodily characteristics (e.g., a limp or a way of talking), the community experienced by the character, as well as the relationships and associated feelings of that character. A few days after a LARP, Hope gives an example of the character Mort sticking to her: *"in the past few days I've sometimes gotten this feeling like, woops, I'm being super courteous and mindful or something. So it's sort of more Mort, that's not really me"* (Hope). Dawn also gives an example: *"Accents always stick to you! And then you start talking like that yourself…"*

The leak of self to character breaks one's experience of LARP, but the reverse can have more long-term repercussions. The leak of emotions and experiences from a character to a LARPer often results in a considerable amount of post-LARP depression (PLD), which can be both positive and negative. It seems that if the experiences, emotions, and characteristics of the character cannot be put at a distance, the LARP character tends to leak into the LARPer.

A leak of emotions to the self can result in very negative experiences. For instance, one LARPer has described her most disagreeable LARP to have involved playing a character whose parents were dead. The game took place right after a close relative of hers had passed away, and caused her to relive the grief and shock on a personal level. Wade points out that *"LARPs can clearly affect things... I've heard of people getting really scared of something and then really start fearing it in their own life"*. He continues: *"negative experiences in the game can affect* you. *For example oppressive situations, scary situations, depressing situations, these types of things can affect the player outside the game."* This further supports the need to keep the self and the character apart. Negative emotional leakage is usually rejected immediately, as I illustrated earlier with May's experience of LARPing a mentally ill character.

When it is positive, LARPers tend to hold on to the leak of emotion for a longer period of time, in the way Dawn describes here:

> *Dawn: I was in this game "Voldemort's war". It was the second time it was being played when I was playing, and I had an insanely good game. I was seriously … I had post-LARP depression for two or three weeks after that game…Yeah, it was pretty horrible. So, it was kind of like a situation that the character got to realise herself in a really interesting way. There was nothing particularly special about that game, but somehow… the experience! […] I played an auror and like…I remember I fell into this bog [laughs] and like I my shoes and pants were wet up to my knees, but like, that was part of the fun as well that I was completely cold running around in a forest. And that was pretty much it. I can't even remember what made it so much fun, but sometimes you just get like that, that the game is really successful. Like you get a feeling that all the pieces click.*

A performance, in which everything *"clicks"* thus often results in PLD and a leak of emotions, which are not, in this case, experienced as negative. When experienced as favourable, a leak of emotion allows individuals to gain experiences with positive and educational aspects, without possible negative side effects: *"From a positive side, the emotions sticking to you do let you understand things from many different levels. Suddenly something like stealing has a million background elements and influences that I have never even noted before"* (May).

A leak of experience and emotion to the self is more likely to happen when individuals have a character that they can identify with: *"If it's a character that you can relate to and it's compelling, it really easily sticks to you […] But like, if you have a bland character that doesn't really end up doing anything, then it doesn't* (Dawn). A leak is also more likely to happen when LARP involves intense experiences: *"If you have a long and more intensive game, then after it you can have difficulties getting out of the character, like you can still feel what the character feels"* (Peg).

The main way that the leak of emotions and traits to the self occurs is when characters share many traits and characteristics with the player's "real" self. *"If the character is really similar to what you are like, then it's sort of more difficult because it's difficult to differentiate what thoughts are the character's and what are your own,"* Peg explains. Playing a character that is very similar to one's self is, however, "*much easier"* (May) because the performance emerges very naturally and does not require the same level of preparation for the performance, or mental and physical effort during it. Some LARPers, especially ones new to the activity, sometimes prefer characters more similar to their self.

> *Chase: It's basically like this: the closer [the character] is to yourself, the easier it is to play it. So, like…it doesn't make sense to take a character that's really different because you can't play it. Like for me…I have a really good sense of humour myself, and playing Thomas [a very serious and uptight LARP character] was really difficult…he's really like sour and stuff. It was really fun though. But it was really challenging.*

Most LARPers, however, find performing characters that are similar to their everyday self *not* to be enjoyable or engaging. Hope exclaimed during an interview: *"I wouldn't want to play* myself*!"* Dot points out that *"the LARP world is not real"* and

thus experiences in it, both negative and positive need to be kept from mixing into everyday life. *"When a character is really close to myself, then it's really hard for me to differentiate between the character and me,"* says Dawn. LARPers fear mixing their self and their character, as by embracing a character with no distance to the self, one can get *"stuck"* (May) in it, resulting in more PLD, possible negative experiences, and alienation from everyday life. The experience of LARPing a character similar to one's self can thus become unpleasant, as it may result in reliving "*unwanted experiences"* (May). Overlap with personal life events in a LARP *can* be "*therapeutic"* (Field note), as reliving an experience from a different or distanced point of view can provide closure or understanding. However, this requires for the LARPer to be able to keep personal and LARP experiences apart.

A LARP character with a different or even an opposing perspective as well as bodily characteristics seems to be much easier to embrace in the conscious performance of LARP, as the guidelines are clearer and it is not as easy to associate it with personal opinions or emotions: *"…if the character is different then it is easier in a certain way to behave according to that character because you can make the difference all the time, that this is now the character,"* Peg explains. It is also *"much more challenging"* (May) to play a character that is different from one's self, as it requires more *"preparation"* and *"planning"* (Wade). Through attending LARPs, I have noticed that individuals new to LARPing often find it more difficult to perform characters different from their everyday self and social status, and easily slip back into their naturalised habits. Dawn describes a similar experience: *"When I was starting out, I would be like 'I'm like this' so I don't want a character that is aggressive or active or talkative so I would always play these super quiet characters."* However, it is also *"more fun"* (May) to attempt to perform something different, as "*it's much more interesting to play something different in a LARP, something not like real life"* (Peg). Dawn continues that as she has attended more LARPs, she's realised it is *"much more fun to LARP different character and test out different things, to really go all out."* As individuals realise the possibility to try out new experiences, they usually become very excited about and interested in their prospects.

The everyday self seems, nevertheless, to be present to some degree in all character performances, be they distant or close to the self: *"I have this theory,"* says Sue, *"that every character has a part of you in it […] It all starts from yourself."* In fact, LARPers stress that it is necessary for the character to have some similarity to the self, as this creates a point of identification and connection. *"If the characters feels like nothing comes remotely close to yourself then it feels really difficult"* (Wade). The everyday self is the starting point of the character and its performance, because it is the LARPer who interprets, builds, and performs the character as it comes to life during the LARP. LARPers have described characters to feel like a very close *"friend"* (Dot) or *"sibling"* (Sue) that they can easily connect and make contact with, but that never replace their own self.

I suggested earlier that fantasy performance involves the experience of explicit time and thus a doubleness of body (Wyllie 2005; Fuchs 2010). I propose that in disrupting lived time, fantasy performance further creates a doubleness of temporality. LARPers become explicitly aware of their lived time and lived body that are a part of reality performance, but simultaneously reflexively engage in

fantasy performance that involves a different space and time as well as bodily performance. Hence, two parallel performances with their own time are experienced. Moreover, while the temporality of reality may become desynthesised through explicitly experienced time (as Wyllie 2005 and Fuchs 2010 describe), the fantasy performance seems to involve an internally consistent and flowing, yet explicitly perceived temporality. The latter is based on the clear structures of the fantasy performance provided for the LARP.

This doubleness of temporality further allows PLD to be explained as the activity of resynthesising personal lived time as well as resynchronising with the intersubjectivity of one's everyday life, which can be a painful process (Wyllie 2005; Fuchs 2010). The leak or bleed between self and character are then the inability to keep the two temporalities distinct and possibly incorporating elements of one into the other when resynthesising explicit time into lived time. Performing characters closer to the self both emotionally and in terms of characteristics thus results in more PLD because they cause difficulty in distinguishing between the temporality of fantasy and reality as well as the necessary resynchronisation with everyday life.

All in all, LARP involves an explicit and reflexive doubleness of performance that extends to the temporality and embodiment of the event. However, in contrast with previous literature, the explicit time of fantasy performance is internally consistent and synchronised with others. A well-balanced performance of a LARP character requires a balance of difference and similarity to self, with the former providing novelty and interest and the latter elements to relate to. *"It's nice if there's something a little bit similar, because then it's easier to relate to them. But like in the main features they should be very different"* (Peg). Performers nevertheless clearly and consciously differentiate the performance of self and character, but the two can leak into one another, especially if they bear similarities or if the performance of the latter is particularly emotional. Leak happens if elements of the two performances are mixed when resynthesising personal lived time and resynchronising it with intersubjective time.

8.1.4 Learning from the Fantasy Performance

While responsibility for emotions and experiences is given to the character, LARPers themselves often learn new things through taking on social and bodily characteristics not natural to them. In describing a character that she felt would be very difficult to LARP, Rose says, *"It's like an interesting challenge I took. I said to myself 'Yes, I can totally do this!'"* Rose describes herself as quite a shy and quiet person, while this character was very loud, sociable, and in everyone's face. The context of the LARP performance nevertheless allowed her to take on this challenging character with relative ease both in its cognitive and bodily aspects. Dawn points out that such challenging experiences of LARPing can be interesting and educational: *"It's been really interesting trying to, for example, play a religious person, as I am myself an atheist. […] You learn from these experiences…and it's really interesting and fun."* LARPers enjoy taking on different types of characters, as they gain new perspectives and

experience things they normally would not, even if these are not necessarily fun or positive.

> *May: I don't really know if it's that bad if [the character's experience] is intensely negative because it's still a different experience. And it can help you sometimes understand certain things you wouldn't otherwise understand. And really many players say that sometimes it's fun to play a character that doesn't really do anything else but get a lot of shit from other people. Because it's still an experience. And sometimes it really is fun to have the permission to be totally down and angst, which you wouldn't necessarily be allowed to do yourself.*

LARPers enjoy trying out different kinds of characters in different LARPs, as this is *"interesting and lets you...sort of see what [characters] hold within themselves"* (Rose). Individuals get to see and understand *"what other people's lives are like, what are they like and how they have ended up in them […] you understand what things are necessary to be that person"* (Rose). LARPers become aware of the elements various identities are made up of and how these can be performed in different ways.

In taking on various LARP characters and reflecting on them through debriefs and metaplay, individuals can also become aware of the identities possible in their everyday life, allowing them to experiment with and modify their own identities. Taking a "*different point of view"* (Peg) through the LARP character *"makes new sides of yourself evident and encourages you. […] It has made my self-image stronger"* (Rose). Hope points out how she has learned new things about herself through exaggerating various character elements: *"When I overemphasised some characteristics in that character, then I like exaggerated them and then I noticed that these are characteristics that I have avoided in myself or hidden in myself. I was sort of like a revelation. Like 'aaah, I haven't noticed this in myself."* May explains how she has learned new things about herself in a different way: through the opposition of opinions and reactions between herself and her characters. *"When you play a character, you notice that you would react differently to a situation than the character does. And then you understand that ok, now I know how I would react to that. I don't know…at least for me personally that brings a lot into my life."* The performance of fantasy in LARP thus allows individuals *"to observe yourself sort of like through different types of characters but totally separate from myself"* (Rose), allowing them to reflect and build on their self. Individuals become more in tune with themselves and their community, as through understanding various characters, they also understand other people as well as their own reactions and behaviours better. "*You start thinking about things in a different way"* (Peg).

These processes are aided by the distance created to both the self and the character through metaplaying, as it allows individuals to compare and reflect on performance. The created distance is very calming, as individuals are not personally responsible for the decisions and actions of the character. Peg says that, as a result, *"it's very easy in a LARP to make decisions that you normally would not."* Sue elaborates: *"You don't have to think like that was a really stupid decision, because it's the character's."* For example, I have LARPed a character whose central characteristics were not caring about anything or anyone, which resulted in a great number of arguments and acts of selfish behaviour from her part within the LARP. However, as these actions were not my own, I did not need to bear their consequences or

regret any of my actions, and thus could happily enjoy the experience. Through this experienced distance, individuals are not directly influenced by their actions and are thus free to try out new things within the limitations of the character.

The learning processes are further aided by the clear structuring of the character that is taken on. The LARP provides participants with a set of characteristics, emotions, goals, contacts, etc. Engaging in the performance of such a well-defined character gives individuals a sense of *"clarity"* (Rose), which they seem to lack in their everyday lives. Wade points out that *"it is really freeing and stuff to be some other guy and do something really specific, something that is really clear… which are my goals for the next 6 hours."* Individuals do not need to be confused about who they are and what they should be going, or sort out their emotions and attitudes, as these are given to them through the structure of the character. This clarity can be compared to the performance of the everyday self, thus giving insight to how it is structured and what elements it entails.

The explicit experiences of body and time that emerge as part of the fantasy performance of LARP increase self-awareness and awareness of one's surroundings (Wyllie 2005; Fuchs 2010). The duality of temporality and embodiment thus promote the learning processes described previously. The temporalities of both fantasy and reality become unfolded in their past, present, and future, with their elements becoming explicitly differentiated and reflected on by the performers. Consequently, the roles and structures of performance become visible to performers.

LARPers seem to be able to build life experience through LARP performances. In a debrief, after an emotionally difficult LARP, a LARPer pointed out: *"I always learn from my characters selectively. I can keep the positive things, but then I can put the negative things away."* Individuals consciously develop as a person, gain deeper self-understanding, and learn about who they would want to become through taking on the lives of various LARP characters. In addition to the very specific knowledge and practical skills of the character that they need to perform, LARPers have pointed out a development in the more general aspects of their lives, such as "*communication skills"* (Dawn)*, "management skills"* (Rose), and *"leadership skills"* (Wade). Individuals gain confidence in themselves, becoming *"more active and social"* (Dot) in their lives. Dawn describes similar experiences in more detail:

> *Dawn: I feel like I'm a completely different person compared to when I started [LARPing]! In my opinion I've become much more of an extrovert and I'm much more able in communicating with people and…what else…hmm…I can do small talk! But yeah, I think I've changed in a really positive direction. […] Roughly put, it has made me a better person. It has brought a lot of self-confidence when you have different character, so that I can present myself differently on the outside. Like, for example, I feel like I can be much more in like a job interview.*

To summarise, LARPing influences individuals significantly on a personal level, helping them to develop. The experience allows them to continuously experience and experiment with new things, as well as reflect on performances and their elements through the explicitly temporal and bodily performance. LARPers gain *"new perspectives"* (Rose) and become *"more open"* (Dot) to things. In engaging in

various fantasy performances, LARPers learn how to be different people and thus generate new possibilities also for themselves.

8.1.5 Discussion: Negotiating the Self and the Fantasy Character

Goffman (1974) wrote that we change roles all the time to fit the various situations we find ourselves in. However, he also pointed out that the characters we perform and our understanding of our self can more or less be equated (Goffman 1959), which leads us to the perception of a continuous identity. What is most interesting about fantasy experiences in the context of LARP is that this does not occur. Individuals perceive a distinct self and a distinct character, breaking the continuity of identity and its merging with various roles. In exploring theatre, many theoreticians and directors (e.g., Stanislavski 1953; Badiou 1990) have similarly pointed out that an actor needs to obtain a distance to their everyday self for their performance to be meaningful and not mere repetitive work. Actors need to not only feel their experience, but also know that they are feeling it (Schechner 1988).

As I described in my literature review of theatre, there are many perspectives to how the self and the character interact during a theatrical performance. The experience of LARP, however, seems to fit poorly into any theorised theatre analogies. The LARP experience clearly does not correspond with Grotowski's (1968) pure consciousness, as there is continuous reflection. The character and self also do not melt into one, as Strasberg (1987) proposed. The character is not an extension of the self and, ideally, does not create genuine emotion in the way Stanislavski (1953) hoped. The everyday self and the character are indeed separate, as Brecht (1965) proposed, but not in his rational way that lacks any emotion. McConachie (2008) points out that Brecht misunderstood the role of emotion, believing it to impede attention and reflection. Emotion, according to McConachie, is necessary to sustain rational attention through the created empathy and sympathy. Meyerhold (1968) and Brecht (1965) elaborate that actors can experience emotions, but only as a similar emotion to that which comes from their self. However, LARP allows individuals to experience emotions *through* their character without the emotions ever fully becoming their own. The self is always present, as Goffman (1974) theorised with all activity being anchored in it. Even if hidden, it surfaces in the performance from time to time.

Schechner proposed that "theatrical role-playing takes place between "not me" and "not not me" (2006, p. 72). The individual becomes half performed character and half self, with the latter observing, manipulating, and enjoining action to the other half (Schechner 1988). The experience of fantasy performance I have described does not match these ideas, as individuals clearly compare their everyday self, the me, to the character, the not me. Schechner (2006) continues that aesthetic performance does not present the actor with fixed identities and norms. However, the fantasy experiences of my interviewees would suggest the complete opposite, with individuals performing roles that are experienced by them as much more clear and fixed than their everyday ones.

Schechner (2006) also proposes that, in aesthetic performance, actors enter a highly charged in-between space-time, a liminal space. Liminality, however, does not seem to describe the experience LARPers go through very well. Liminality is indeed ambiguous, involves separation from one's everyday life, and makes present that which is fantasy. Liminal entities are neither here nor there. They are in anti-structure, away from positions, customs, and conventions of their culture (Turner 1969). However, liminality is also a state of being between what one left off and what one is heading for, with the goal being to change from one state to another within one's society. Individuals within the state of liminality are thus at a threshold between their previous way of structuring their identity, and a new way, which the ritual establishes (Turner 1982, 1985).

Liminality thus implies the separation from one structure with the aim of returning to that structure in some changed form, as a new self. However, LARP rather aims at separating from the structures of one's everyday self, taking up a different person's life, and then returning to one's everyday self. Such a structure might then be more similar to the concept of liminoid. According to Turner (1987, p, 29), the liminoid became "the successor of the liminal in complex large-scale societies, where individuality and optation in art have in theory supplanted collective and obligatory ritual performances." The liminoid emerges in the form of entertainment and popular culture, and it does not teach or transform individuals, but rather allows the individual to step out of their reality and return to where they left off, unchanged (Turner 1982, 1985, 1987). Once again, this does not describe LARPers' experiences, as they do not seem to leave a structure, but rather negotiate two structures simultaneously, thus becoming very aware of both. One of these structures involves their everyday self, from which they become distanced. The other is the character that exists in a fantasy world, and is thus never fully reachable. Moreover, LARPers *can* learn from their experiences, even if this is not the aim or an expected result of these performances.

Lastly, Chekhov (1995) proposed that the self exists on three levels in aesthetic performance. These levels are the self, the character, and the ideal self that controls the other two. In LARP, individuals also distinctly experience a self and a character, from both of which they are distanced. The performance is based in the negotiation of the two through metaplay, which could be said to resemble Chekhov's ideal self. Metaplay, however, is not a self, but rather a process of reflection and self-reflection that takes a step back from one's identity. This bears some similarity to Paskow's (2004) idea of fantasy requiring individuals to be both aware and self-aware. This is also in line with Saler's (2012) idea of ironic imagination. Although he does not delve into the topic of self, Saler proposes that individuals experience fantasy through a double consciousness. All in all, a conscious and negotiated duality of self and character can be seen in the performance of fantasy experiences. I will develop this idea throughout the current chapter.

8.2 Interaction in Fantasy Performance

While each LARPer's performance is important, the characters fully emerge and are shaped into their final form through individuals reacting to one another in the fantasy world. The fantasy comes to life when it is experienced as tangible and real through its shared elements, individuals' support of one another, and the mutual serious attitude towards the context. The experience of shared fantasy is thus based on interaction and the resultant network of relationships and meanings.

In this section, I look more deeply into the performance of interaction that takes place during LARP performances. First, I look at how shared performance of fantasy takes place and how communities emerge in the LARP context on different levels of interaction. Then, I describe how individuals negotiate interaction both as characters and their selves. Lastly, I theorise about the various roles and performances that take place in fantasy experiences.

8.2.1 Shared Performance of Fantasy

The LARP world and the characters "come to life" (Rose) as they are performed by and among the participants. "The text [i.e. the character sheet and the world description]… it's just an interesting starting point and after that you should just let it go at its own pace," Peg explains. Hope elaborates: "It feels really real because everyone really gets into it so well so they're a specific character […] so it creates this atmosphere that we are now here in this camping centre in France." The character becomes real because its characteristics are accepted and taken seriously by others through interaction. "My character has a specific position and I take that specific position there because everyone agrees on it," Rose elaborates. It is the other people's response to individuals playing their characters that legitimises their coming into existence.

Wade suggests that the social network that emerges through the interaction in the LARP becomes the basis of the fantasy experience: *"The most successful games have been ones where there's a really good social network for the characters, because it creates like a framework and the context comes from that."* Rose presents a similar idea, saying that LARPs are *"based on interaction"* and that *"everything works as long as other players are sort of in on it"* (Rose). The performance requires everyone to contribute: *"you are there creating the experience with other people"* (Peg). In line with my findings, Rose and Wood (2005) have shown that individuals accept fantasy that is co-produced as more authentic. Mackay (2001) as well as Abercombie and Longhurst (1998) have further proposed that fantasy is *always* already shared. The latter further elaborate that this happens because fantasy is based in elements of everyday life and media. Similarly, materials used as the basis of LARPs are often based on either direct use or the mixing and matching of elements of popular culture. This coincides with Walton's (1990) and Mackay's (2001) writing, as both believe contemporary fantasy to be largely inspired by or even entirely based in existing media.

The interaction in LARPs occurs within given confines: *"You have to stay true to the character"* (Rose). It is central for the co-created performance that LARPers take their character and the world seriously, are loyal to their perspectives and

emotions, and react to their surroundings through the given framework. The interaction is thus always based on the LARP materials and the brief, which provide individuals with an understanding of their characters and a shared understanding of the world and their relationships in it. As Huizinga (1949) has pointed out in the context of play, a cheat is better than a spoil-sport, as the latter shatters the game world and the unshakeable truth underlying its performance. Similarly, in LARP, the worst thing someone can do is break the shared understanding of the fantasy. If an individual strays from the provided materials, the shared basis of the performance becomes broken, which can impair others' experiences by creating misunderstandings, blocking someone's goals, or even leaving someone out of the performance completely. Hence, LARPers try to avoid doing anything that contradicts the given materials, as Wade explains:

> *Wade: it's written in the character like what your character's goals are and then you should really aim to go for them […] if another person comes up to you and does something then you should play it in a way that is natural to the character.*

May describes how this can be done in practice: *"So I think like, is this the type of solution my character would end up on and with what reasons! Like how would this character justify it?"*

While the basis of the performance, that is the materials, needs to be in place, for the LARP to be an enjoyable experience, the character also needs to have *"a lot of freedom to apply things yourself and to improvise"* (Hope). Individuals need to be flexible enough to allow for different developments and interactions in the LARP. The interaction fills in the gaps and expands ideas stemming from the materials, as players interpret the information individually and in groups. *"The materials are not always perfect",* Peg explains. *"There's always imperfections and loopholes. You sort of patch them up as you go." "The characters start living their own lives"* (Rose), developing their characteristics and goals through interaction among LARPers. This is why LARPers do no plan what they will do within the LARPs, as Peg explains: *"[Referring to a LARP she had just attended] I didn't really think too much beforehand how I wanted the game to go because it will usually never go that way. It never happens that way, that's a tested fact."*

Through the interaction within the shared fantasy, all the pieces of the performance start fitting together, creating what is perceived by LARPers as a consistent entity of a fantasy world and a social network of the characters in it. *"The whole environment and the people, all of its starts to work in a certain way. All of a sudden it starts working. The whole comes together in a certain way"* (Rose). As LARPers points out, LARP experiences are at their best when all the elements *"click"* in this manner to create *"a really great and wholesome experience"* (Hope). *"When you're really in the character, like with their contacts and plotlines […] and all the other players are really in on it as well… it's an absolutely amazing feeling!"* (Dawn). Wade concludes, *"When there's a really good entity and social framework, that's the best experiences I've had."*

Interestingly, while the temporality of a LARP performance is explicit, it is also intersubjectively synchronised, as performers make sure that all action and interaction is based on shared understanding. Fuchs (2010) has described explicit time to involve individuals out of sync with others and with social processes. This

may be true for the lived time of everyday life, but in the performance of fantasy, temporality becomes explicitly and reflexively synchronised with others and with one's surroundings.

LARPers stress that for the performance elements to click, individuals need to be supportive of each others' performances. Such support can happen in a very direct manner, through individuals going OFF-game during a performance to discuss what is going on, or to give a hint, a warning, or a reminder to a co-player. For example, in a LARP that I attended where some players had received deficient contact lists, and therefore players had to momentarily go OFF-game to tell each other who their characters where and how they were connected to one another. While OFFing is common, it is not favoured by LARPers, as it involves pausing the fantasy performance and thus stepping out of the fantasy world and character. Therefore, the support among LARPers tends to be much more subtle and comes through accepting and reacting appropriately to each others' performances, as Wade exemplifies: *"If other people want to do something then you should always go along with it. Like you should never reject another person's idea."* Individuals feel that they have a *"pretty big responsibility"* (Rose) to others to do a good job. *"It's the LARPer's responsibility to take into consideration that there are also other people there,"* says Wade. Hence, individuals feel considerable self-imposed pressure to perform believably and engage in a supportive way aiming to *"create a good experience for all the players"* (Wade) and *"help other players to experience the LARP in an authentic way"* (May). Rose gives an example when describing a vampire LARP she had attended:

> *Rose: It's through the people getting into the game and interacting that the illusion is created, that here we are as vampires. And you boost that yourself […] you need to make the character clear so that others can properly react to them […] I'm really scared that… like I don't want to ruin other people's experiences by doing a bad job.*

As it becomes evident, the co-creation of a LARP performance requires individuals to be reactive to others in a positive way. However, for the LARP to really work and be *"interesting and rewarding"* (Rose), LARPers need to be both reactive *and* active. Wade explains:

> *Wade: "It really helps the game if someone clearly comes in and creates a game situation and I easily go along with that […] If I notice that things just don't progress, then I start being active. And like I might even force myself to talk to people and ask them things and do stuff so that things progress. Because, I don't know, it really pisses me off to be all passive. Or like somehow you can be reactive is something happens and you react to stuff all the time, but sometimes you just need to be more proactive about it, so that you don't just let things happen and follow that 'oh what are people doing'…but you start doing things for it to work."*

LARPers often go out of their way to do things they *"normally would never do"* (Rose) in order to actively create interaction. They *"go all out"* (Dawn) and *"go completely overboard"* (Wade) by engaging in actions that may seem intimidating, scary, or just silly in order to create a good experience for other players. Dramatised interaction seems to be a central aspect of the LARP experience: "*you want to*

create interesting drama among characters …because that's interesting…it creates interesting content to LARP" (Wade). LARPers enjoy being dramatic and active when performing characters, as it *"makes no sense holding back"* (Dawn) in the closed context of a LARP world. Many LARPers abide by, what they call, *"the rule of the bigger drama,"* which encourages LARPers, within the confines of the given materials, to always build interaction within games that creates more spectacular and exciting experiences, even if it leads to negative outcomes for their own character. This "rule" underlines the non-competitive and co-performed nature of LARP. To give an example of the rule being used, in a Finnish winter war LARP that I attended, a LARPer performing a character who was wanted by the military chose to intentionally lose the confrontation he had with an officer and be taken prisoner, as this created a much more interesting experience for the other players. Rose gives another example:

> *Rose: The more I've LARPed, the more I've internalised the rule of the bigger drama, like for example in that cowboys and indians game I had to make a really fast choice that do I help with the murder of this character or not, like do we kill the bad guy or not, but then the rule of the bigger drama! My character decided yes. And I mean the character technically could have decided otherwise in that situation, it was pretty much 50-50 to her personally. But then you need to realise that you have to think about the gameplay, but that's a part of metaplay.*

All in all, the performance of fantasy interaction can be described as the result of the encounter between an individual and a shared fantasy, which needs to be balanced by each LARPer. Individuals negotiate personal ideas and desires, combining and modifying them with others' for the benefit of the shared performance, as *"it's much more fun when it's a communal experience"* (Wade). To co-perform the fantasy, individuals need to be both active and reactive, as well as simultaneously true to the improvisation based on the given materials, thus creating an explicitly synchronised performance. LARPers need to support each other's experiences to create a sense of security, yet also allow freedom.

A personal fantasy is highly limited to and restricted by one's own ideas, knowledge, experiences, and possibilities. When it is shared, fantasy can be developed and extended beyond such limits through combining details and creating completely new elements. *"You get a lot of support from other players…because you can imagine things better and get much more interesting situations. So how it develops among all the players, that's the most interesting part,"* Rose explains. Walton (1990) has pointed out that imagining can be done just as easily on your own, but it is more exciting when it is given to us by others, as it imparts a sense of exploration. Saler (2012), stresses that interaction is central for fantasy to be able to sustain enchantment and to develop and nurture our experiences with non-reality. He further points out that the emergence of new possibilities through fantasy is only possible through interacting with others in its context. I would propose that the fantasy experience is actually an intricate balance of individual and shared fantasy. Through the shared fantasy of LARP, individuals become a part of something that is much greater than any of their individual fantasies through creating and believing together. The performance, however, requires the individual fantasies as a basis for

"recombining bits of previously behaved behaviours" (Schechner 2006, p. 35) into something novel and shared.

8.2.2 Fantasy Community and Subculture Community

Interaction during a LARP performance involves two communities: the fantasy community created through the fantasy context of the LARP and the subculture community of LARPers in the social context. By fantasy community, I refer to the relationships among the characters that emerge as fantasy is performed. The subculture community is the relationships among LARPers as their selves, formed through the shared hobby. I already mentioned that LARPers in Finland are not strictly organised into clubs or associations. The subculture community is thus vague and transient, reforming with every LARP. The two communities are intrinsically linked, as I will show next.

A fantasy community that is based on a social network of characters develops fast within a LARP. Players receive ready, written relationships and discuss their various aspects through briefing, creating very straightforward interactions with little misunderstanding or miscommunication. Rose gives an example: *"In this LARP I was in in February…there was my [character's] best friend from like childhood and I didn't know [the player] but we just spontaneously started hugging and telling one another everything in the game."*

Once the LARP is over, the LARPer leaves the fantasy community in which they were performing behind. However, strong emotions easily arise during a LARP, as individuals are very focused and supportive, and the themes of the games tend to be excessively dramatic. Friendships among LARPers often emerge out of the strong, shared fantasy experiences. Sue explains: *"LARP friends also become your friend friends. And you notice how it happens through characters."* Rose adds that *"relationships develop much faster,"* as you experience a lot together in a short amount of time. Moreover, as I already discussed earlier, the emotions and experiences sometimes leak from LARP into everyday life. This leak can also occur within the interaction and relationships among characters. *"If someone had a really strong character or played a close contact, it can sort of linger,"* says Wade. I will elaborate on this in the next section.

Close contacts within a LARP thus often develop into a LARPer's closest friends within the subculture community through the shared fantasy experiences and leak of emotion. Interestingly, this does not necessarily require LARPers' characters to have a happy or positive relationship, but is rather the result of strong emotions and intense interaction. For instance, LARPers describe their most memorable character relationships to have involved sworn enemies, bickering couples, and annoying friends. When the LARP is over, the intensity of the character relationship and experiences resulting from it stay with the individuals, excluding any possible negative sides of the fantasy experience.

The subculture community consciously stresses the equality of all its members and lacks a hierarchy, which reflects the egalitarian nature of Finnish culture. GMs obviously gain a momentary high status, but only for the duration of the

LARP and in terms of organising their own LARP. Moreover, LARPers stress that LARPing may seem very *"difficult"* (Rose), but it does not actually require any special skills. The performance rather requires the participant to be supportive, take the context *"seriously enough"* (Peg), and *"do their best"* (Wade). This would support the idea that fantasy experiences do not require any additional abilities, but come rather naturally to people. Furthermore, having experience in LARPs does not gain individuals any new status within the subculture. Experienced players are indeed better known among other LARPers, but this only results in obtaining more information about and invitations to up-coming games. Moreover, as LARPers gain experience, they become comfortable with more demanding and central roles, and GMs become more willing to cast them in such characters. *"The more I've LARPed, the more I want to be active in games,"* Rose explains. Wade elaborates that taking on more difficult characters who have more authority and responsibility *"is fun because I do want to develop my own games and I want to develop myself as a player."* Experience thus gives better access to games and roles, but does not raise the status of the individual within LARP.

The subculture community is ephemeral and momentary, reforming with each LARP, yet it also tends to form certain pockets of individuals that overlap more often in games. As individuals LARP more, they tend to gravitate towards certain types of games. This seems to be driven by three elements. Firstly, as I already pointed out, the information about LARPs is mostly spread through word-of-mouth, either in face-to-face interaction or through social media. Consequently, LARPers are limited by their own network in terms of obtaining information on LARPs. This limited nature of the spread of information becomes enforced as individuals LARP more together and form close relationships through strong, shared LARP experiences.

Secondly, individuals become attracted to certain types of games in terms of their themes. I witnessed this when attending different kinds of LARPs. For instance, LARPs with medieval themes were usually attended by a specific group of people, while sci-fi-themed games attracted another group, and high fantasy yet others. There is certainly considerable overlap, with LARPers preferring several types of games as well as often trying out different things; however, a vague core group can be seen for different themes. This is also likely to be influenced by the spread of information from individual to individual.

Thirdly, individuals seem to attend different LARPs with different aims, which change with time. As I will show in more detail later, people often start LARPing driven by an interest in or even a fascination with the themes, characters, and media used as the basis of the performance. With time, however, LARPers become more focused on the individuals participating in LARPs and interacting with them in fantasy contexts.

> *A long-time LARPer was telling me on the way to a LARP that he does not really LARP because of the games themselves anymore but rather because he wants to see all of his LARPer friends who he cannot see otherwise and to discuss various quirky topics that he usually does not get to engage in. (Field note)*

8.2.3 Negotiating Interaction as Characters and Everyday Selves

In the same way that LARPers aim to keep their self and character apart, they consciously negotiate the interaction taking place during a LARP. The interaction and relationships are not natural to individuals, thus requiring continuous, conscious attention that is negotiated through metaplay, a process I discussed earlier. Roles and interaction normally become naturalised in everyday performances through their repeated performance by individuals (Goffman 1959; Cohen and Taylor 1976; Butler 2004). This naturalisation of roles and performances does not, however, take place in LARP. Individuals continuously change roles, social structures, and relationships to one another within various LARPs, driven by the fact that they find it *"interesting to try different things"* (Dawn). Moreover, as I have shown earlier, fantasy performance involves explicit, yet also explicitly synchronised temporality. This creates performance that is much more clear in its structure than that of everyday life, and, simultaneously allows for reflection on it.

LARPers aim to keep real and character relationships strictly apart. Even as the shared fantasy experiences build relationships among LARPers, individuals often want to clearly differentiate any "real" relationships they have from those of the characters in fear of mixing the two or one leaking into the other. I discussed the idea of leak of emotion and experience in the previous sections of this chapter. Rose explains, for instance, that she does not like LARPing close contacts with her boyfriend who also LARPs, as she feels she could not keep their real relationship at bay and thus could not perform her character well. At the same time, she stresses that she would never want to LARP any type of negative contact with him, as she is afraid of such experiences tainting their "real" relationship. Leak of emotions can, once again, happen either way.

Similar to the performance of characters, LARPers experience the relationships among characters to be much more *"clear"* (Dot), *"understandable"* (Rose), and *"straightforward"* (Wade) compared to their everyday counterparts. This is made possible through the LARP materials and briefs that take pace before the performance. Everyday interaction is based on a common stock of knowledge, the access to which may be varied or limited. Moreover, while interaction is heavily patterned through normative schemes, it holds an immense possibility for pretence and misinterpretation (Berger and Luckmann 1966). This problem is eliminated in the interaction within the fantasy performance of LARP, as interaction is extremely transparent, easy to understand, and is based on a very clear and specific stock of knowledge. It is almost as if to perform characters and their relationships, LARPers receive a ready set of cultural and social capital or even primary socialisation for the fantasy world (following Bourdieu 1990) that they can start using instantly without the hassle of actually acquiring it.

The interaction that individuals engage in during fantasy performance is not only extremely clear, but also gains feedback and the perspectives of all the parties involved. Through the debriefs that take place after the performance, individuals are able to obtain feedback, to fill in and broaden their understandings of their own experiences and interactions. As Fine (1983) wrote, individuals normally gain only a version of the interaction that takes place in everyday interaction. LARP performance, however, allows individuals to gain a full, multi-sided knowledge of

the interaction. Wade finds this to be one of the greatest elements of LARPing: *"No matter what the game is or how it goes, people always talk about their experiences and that's great."* Hope further points out that *"It's a great feeling to get to share experiences and to hear how it went for others. In the debrief, I tried to find out all the things that bothered me personally."* This exchange of perspectives allows LARPers to see how their performance was viewed, received, and reacted to by others, allowing them to develop and build on their understanding of interaction.

Schechner (1988) describes performance to involve depicting emotions and meanings in a recognisable way. Butler (2004) further stresses that personhood is actually tied to the desire of being recognised. Recognition, in turn, requires the performance one gives and gives off to match (Goffman 1959). Within LARP, individuals have a clear picture of what they *want to be recognised as* through the character they are performing. They are also able to gain an understanding of how they *were recognised* by others through their support during the performance as well as discussion and feedback after the performance. This allows LARPers to learn how to perform characteristics and elements of a self that are understood in specific ways. Dot supports this idea and gives an example:

> *Dot: I really appreciate the fact that character are…very…clear, I appreciate that in all characters. Like when they walk into the room and everyone knows who that is… I've played two characters in the same game, and I noticed there that it's really important for everyone to know right away that who you are at that moment. And it's not the clothes or anything, it like has to be far away from myself and it has to be very clear. Like Igor [a character in a recent LARP she attended] is very clear, you know already from the way he talks who he is. Or like the way he comments or says anything. You have to take into consideration the status and presence and things like that. Like take on some mannerisms or something.*

Through the various types of interaction that they take on in LARP performance, LARPers are further able to reflect on their everyday relationships and interactions by contrasting and linking them to those of their fantasy characters. The lack of continuity that breaks the possibility of naturalisation supports this reflection on performance. *"I would say the interaction [in LARPs] has had a huge effect on me. It has an effect in the sense that if you're in certain social situations in a game then it does affect how you begin to act in mundane situations as well,"* says Wade. Individuals gain new perspectives on how relationships work and what their own role in them is. For example, I have LARPed characters in various LARPs that are either a mother or a daughter in mother-daughter relationships. Engaging in these types of interaction has allowed me to reflect on my own relationship with my mother and gain understanding of her perspectives and reasons for actions.

Lastly, LARPers stress that the bodily face-to-face aspect of interaction is central to the experience, and it is an element that they miss very much in their everyday lives, in which most interaction takes place through social media. Dawn describes that most of the time she is *"alone on the computer […] and it's missing that aspect of human contact, like you can't read their body language, like for example are they thinking hard or is something really easy for them."* This coincides with ideas proposed by Illouz (2007) and Auslander (1992). They have theorised that individuals are slowly

losing contact with one another both physically and emotionally due to technology and its growing role in interaction. Illouz (2007) proposes that communication in contemporary culture has become decontextualised, disembodied, unemotional, unclear, and indirect. Auslander (1992) similarly argues that mass media has helped create a culture, where individuals form connections only to the medium, but no longer directly to one another. In contrast, Walton (1990) has suggested that all participation in media consumption is somehow physical: we read a book, we listen to music, and we watch television. However, my interviewees exemplify that this is not enough. LARP performance allows close and intense face-to-face interaction, which is lacking in LARPers' everyday lives. Rose explains that such interaction is much more interesting and meaningful.

> *Rose: The physical experience leaves you with much more, like I don't mean that you physically hurt someone, but there is more residue of the experience left among people […] and because you physically do things, you have to move more and your brain works better and you think better, and somehow it's much easier to develop the situation and character that way.*

As LARP performances are based on face-to-face interaction, they allow the transference of what Schechner (1982) conceptualised as performance knowledge. This results in performance imbued with much more meaning and interaction (Schechner 1982). In fantasy experiences of LARP, individuals learn things they normally could not learn in everyday life or which would have taken them longer to learn, as knowledge is passed down to individuals body to body. This embodied knowledge is then transferred to other contexts, such as the LARP subculture and the individuals' everyday lives.

All in all, through their interaction as characters in a LARP performance, LARPers obtain insight into how various relationships and interactions work, what elements influence their development, and what their own role within these can be. These processes emerge through the comparison of interaction in fantasy performance to the interaction in everyday performance, a lack of naturalisation of performance, a multi-sided view of the interaction, and bodily face-to-face interaction. LARPers gain the possibility to better understand what motivates and moulds others' actions and interactions, as well as how to clearly and directly communicate to others. This is supported by the explicitly synchronised nature of the performance.

8.2.4 Discussion: Spectating and Acting in Fantasy Performance

The LARP performance follows the structure of a theatrical performance in many ways, as it is a temporally and spatially framed performance that is often dramatic and excessive; it is done for an audience, and it occurs in a context consciously alternate to everyday life. However, at the same time, the interaction of individuals within the LARP performance follows patterns more common to social performance. There is no spatially or physically divided audience and actors, there is no

specific stage, and the interaction taking place is unscripted, emergent, and taken very seriously.

Mackay (2001), in his study of role-playing games (RPG), proposed that RPG in general is similar to theatre. However, he also suggested that one aspect of the RPG performance is similar to social performance: individuals make no distinction between being an audience member or a performer. In contrast with Mackay's (2001) ideas, McAuley (2000) and Lin (2012) have stressed that the interaction between audience and actors is a defining aspect of theatre performance. Following these ideas, I propose that while there is no distinction between actors and spectators in LARP, the distinction between acting and spectating actually becomes *more* pronounced in fantasy performance. Within a LARP, each individual consciously both spectates and acts: they react to others simultaneously as a spectator and an actor, negotiating these performances through the process of metaplay.

It is important to note that I am using the concepts of spectating and acting somewhat differently from Goffman (1959). Goffman believed everyday interaction to be similar to theatre performance: everyday life consists of a stage with props, where individuals are actors performing for an audience. The actors, however, are also the spectators of their viewers' performances. For Goffman, actor and spectator are roles taken on in any performance, which are, nevertheless, rarely differentiated from and often become equated with the individual's self. Consequently, Goffman's ideas of actor and spectator roles could be interpreted as engaging with one's context and observing the context. However, just as Goffman himself writes, we do both in any interaction. In my conceptualisation, I am thus relying more on how actors and spectators are viewed in the study of aesthetic performance. I propose to look at spectating and acting as different types of performance, rather than as roles that we take. I elaborate on these ideas next.

In the fantasy context of the LARP, individuals primarily perceive others as the characters they are portraying. This is because individuals create a bodily image of the character through props and consciously directed performance. This is supported by other individuals consciously attaching the elements agreed upon beforehand to the character. The interaction in the context of fantasy thus transpires among actors in the form of fantasy characters.

The self is nevertheless always consciously present during the fantasy performance of LARP, ready to spring to action if needed. The self spectates the performance and continuously reflects on it. Moreover, a physical presence of the self always remains alongside the performed character. While individuals prop and change their body movements to embrace the "front" of the character, a certain bodily presence always remains. *"Even when the other person is in character and you are yourself in character, there is always still the person's own being and you somehow notice it,"* Rose explains. Goffman (1974) has similarly noted that the self always remains as part of performance, no matter how hidden it is. Therefore, individuals also interact as spectators that take form in their everyday selves.

Spectators are generally seen as passive and their role is often neglected in the context of aesthetic performance. They are, however, an inseparable part of performance (Abercombie and Longhurst 1998; McAuley 2000; McConachie

2008). Kennedy (2009) described the audience as relinquishing a part of its agency to assist the spectacle, yet retain the ability to communicate in a restricted manner through pre-decided gestures. In LARP, such communication can take two forms. Firstly, it can take place on a personal level, as the individual continuously engages in the negotiation of the self and the character, limiting or challenging the latter and feeding them information. Secondly, the communication can happen among LARPers taking the form of gestures, comments, and actions done OFF-game. When necessary, the spectator emerges with the aim to comment, guide, or negotiate interaction in the fantasy context. Goffman (1959) has pointed out that theatre performance always involves cues among actors that are invisible to the audience and that help the actors sustain the performance. In LARP, the cues can become very visible. They are exchanged only in spectating and then negotiated into acting through the use of metaplay.

It would seem that acting corresponds with being IN-game and spectating with being OFF-game. In acting IN-game, a LARPer only acts, reacts, interacts, and uses information and emotions known to the fantasy character and appropriate for the fantasy context. In spectating OFF-game, the same LARPer knows and feels much more, guiding the acting through this information. The spectator has knowledge of the general LARP rules as well as the materials for the specific LARP and LARP character. Moreover, the spectator retains the knowledge, perspectives, and emotions of the self, reacting to the fantasy performance taking place in their own right. These reactions and emotions of the self can leak into the fantasy performance when the individual is overwhelmed or careless. Individuals are continuously aware of their performance both IN-game and OFF-game and are thus also aware that others are performing both IN-game and OFF-game. While individuals are aware of each others' simultaneous acting and spectating, interaction only happens either among actors or among spectators. As Goffman (1959) would put it, they perform only in one frame at a time. Doing otherwise would either break the seriousness of the fantasy frame, or confuse the reality frame.

These findings correspond with Badiou's (1990) ideas: the actor is subjective and focuses on what actually happens during the performance, while the spectator is in the position of absolute knowledge and is the one who ultimately prescribes the performance meaning. In a similar way, McAuley (2000) explained that the actor is limited by the context in terms of what they are experiencing and interpreting, while the spectator's experience is fully under their own control. The audience can step back from the performance and view it from multiple viewpoints (McConachie 2008).

It can be said that LARPers consciously negotiate both acting and spectating when engaged in fantasy performance, with the latter always having wider knowledge and thus guiding, limiting, and making sense of the former. Individuals do not block or ignore information on different levels in the way Fine (1983) has suggested, but the processes are rather distinct and support one another. However, as I will discuss in more detail later on, individuals are not fully engaged in either acting or spectating, but rather retain distance to both.

8.3 Social Space in Fantasy Performance

The roles of as well as the interaction and relationships among individuals are always prescribed by the social structure they are in (Goffman 1959, 1974; McAuley 2000), continuously co-creating one another (Berger and Luckmann, 1966; Relph 1980). Similarly, the social space of LARP is central to the performance, both supporting and being supported by the characters and their interaction.

In this section, I explore the social space of LARP performance in more detail. First, I describe the shared performance of the fantasy world and fantasy place, which form the fantasy social space. Next, I look at how performers juggle social spaces within fantasy and reality. After that, I discuss the social structure of fantasy from the perspective of the concept of carnival and through its different levels.

8.3.1 Performance of Fantasy World and Place

The performance and interaction of the various characters during the LARP performance takes place in a social space, which *"feels real, but it's … it's like away from the normal world, a different world,"* as Chase puts it. This social space involves both a larger fantasy world as well as the more concrete and sometimes more material fantasy place, in which the performance occurs. The fantasy world and place emerge through a break in the continuity of reality, which is tied into the disruption of lived time that allows a sense of reality in the first place (following Fuchs 2010). The social space of reality becomes explicit, and another world is performed alongside it.

Throughout the LARP performance, LARPers are continuously aware of the fact that the fantasy world is not real. However, simultaneously LARPers stress that the fantasy world feels *"real"* (Chase) and *"authentic"* (Sue). Sue elaborates that *"the world is authentic in that moment and in that situation…so as long as the game lasts."* Hope further describes the experience: *"It feels a lot like that I am really in this world. Everyone immerses* so *well that everyone was that specific character and the environment is just like, we're really here!"* Wade also tries to explain the experience:

> *Wade: I guess we step into like a different environment, which in itself differs from everything else. Like even if you play something that would be quite close to, say, what you do for a living or something similar, it's still completely different in my opinion. I don't really know what it is that makes them different about it, but there's something to it, it feels different, like something in your head saying that this is something completely different. And I mean usually it is something really really far from what you do… running around in a forest, or like 30 years in the past or in the future.*

The fantasy world is *"different from the real world"* (Chase), but it is not random, chaotic, or completely free. The social space is constrained by a structure, a hierarchy, and norms, which are based on the materials provided by GMs and supported by players' insistence on staying *"true to character and to the world"* (Wade).

LARPs are often based on archetypes as well as direct use of or combination of various bits of popular culture "because then it's really easy to build familiar drama for players because it seems like most [LARPers] seem to be into some sort of pop culture thing, so then tying in stuff is easy...like we have these guys who are werewolves and then they know how it goes right away, and that's really cool" (Wade). This corresponds with Mackay's (2001) ideas of contemporary fantasy existing within the context of imaginary entertainment environments. Fantasy performance also tends to be very clichéd and dramatic. "It's a lot of drama," says Wade. "It's usually so different from what you do normally." Through the use of archetypes and clichés, LARPers often perform elements familiar to them from media and everyday life, recombined in new ways. May talks of clichés as providing clarity to the performance:

> *May: Clichés are fun on some level. When you've played enough of them, it's really easy to go back to them. It's like a familiar and safe element in the game. The fact that you sort of know what to expect, what clichés you'll be playing helps make the game more fluid.*

Together with the shared materials and briefs, the basis in familiar elements creates a very *"clear"* (Peg) understanding of the fantasy world for the performers: *"It is important to define as clearly as possible what they world is like…so you know what you are LARPing"* (Peg).

The fantasy world of LARP is very clear and in many ways familiar, but this does not account for individuals perceiving it as real and authentic. LARPers stress that for the fantasy world to feel *"authentic"* (Rose) and *"believable"* (May), its performance needs to be taken seriously and performed in *"as if it were real"* (Dot). The fantasy world thus *"comes to life"* (Peg) through its shared performance among participants. As everyone acknowledges that the LARP starts, the social structure of fantasy takes primacy. LARPers take the new set of rules, norms, and restrictions seriously, and the fantasy world becomes legitimised and experienced as concrete, allowing the fantasy performance to be *"real for the duration of the LARP"* (Peg). Rose points out that *"the entity is most important,"* as all the elements of the LARP perform together to create a new world and a new social structure within it. As I described in earlier sections, it is important for the performance elements to click and create a whole that works well.

> *Rose: People start acting different, but in a specific way, and that really helps a lot, the fact that people that were just a second ago something else are completely different. All of the environment, the props, and people just work in a specific way. All of a sudden everything works in a certain way. The entity starts working in a certain way.*

Similarly, as everyone acknowledges that the LARP is over, the fantasy world no longer limits or has an effect on individuals and is thus no longer taken seriously.

The authenticity is further created through the aid of the physical space and its propping. As Hope puts it, *"The space and environment, the whole surroundings are like, we're here."* LARPs are always bound geographically to their venue, which forces individuals to physically travel in order to interact with the fantasy perfor-

mance. Going away from one's mundane reality and space seems to be an important element of the event, as it physically draws individuals away from their everyday lives and into a different space. Many LARPers prefer games set in secluded spaces that *"are a little out of the way"* (Wade). LARPers stress that *"with ordinary mundane things around you, you don't get the same atmosphere"* (Dawn), which impairs fantasy performance and, as a result, can be very disenchanting. May elaborates:

> *May: I prefer games in closed environments. It creates… I like the fact that it creates a strong image in your head. I've played a few city games among like normal people, and they never leave a strong impression like the ones in secluded spaces. […] It's much harder to keep to the character. Because you have to take so many more things into consideration. Like someone can come up to you and ask about what you're doing.*

The seclusion seems to support the clarity of the fantasy I described earlier. It helps create a secure structure within a space that has no previous meanings attached to it. Moreover, encounters with unexpected elements from outside the fantasy context are minimised and thus under the close control of individuals. There is little chance of contact with outsiders, and most physical and material elements are under the control of GMs and LARPers. *"It's more fun to be* just *around LARPers because other people don't really understand,"* Sue explains. Organisers also tend to select LARP spaces based on their suitability for the game theme. For instance, medieval LARPs are more often held at camping sights, creating a link to nature and a distance to contemporary technology that is often present in the genre. A sci-fi LARP may be held in a warehouse, creating a modern, dystopian, or clinical aesthetic.

The spaces used for LARPs are usually propped to some extend in order to support the transformation of the space into a fantasy place, which is a more concrete part of the performed fantasy world. *"It's really important to plan how you prop the space,"* Sue points out. *"Because it helps you a lot. […] For example you can have a couch, but it would be really good if you modify it somehow so then it looks more like something else, like a ship."* In the same manner as props support the emergence of a character, the propping of the space supports the emergence of the fantasy place within the LARP performance, giving it a clear identity and providing it with shared meanings. Dawn illustrates: *"the propping of the space is a big deal! Like if you're in a space ship and it's just some normal community hall, it's not at all as convincing when it's just lined with garbage bags"*. In the context of theatre performance, McAuley (2000) has stressed that space can support, condition, and even direct performance. McConachie (2008) also purports spatial elements of aesthetic performances to support understanding by giving cues to identifying elements. In a similar way, Walton (1990), in the context of interacting with fiction and art, has theorised that various objects and representations can become the props of make-believe.

The number of props and the amount of effort applied to making them differs considerably from game to game. The absence of props or an inadequate space does not ruin an experience, but their presence can greatly add to it. As Dawn points out, it is most important for the material elements to mask or get rid

of distractions, that is, elements of the environment that do not really fit the fantasy world. *"If the space is not propped at all...well, you have to at least get rid of any distractions, but you get a great wow-effect if you've put a lot of effort into propping the space."* Therefore, if the space cannot be reorganised and decorated thematically for some reason, it needs to at least become neutral. Consequently, I would suggest that a fantasy place can only be performed as part of the fantasy after the space in which it takes place has been stripped of its current or "real" identity as a place.

Fantasy places almost always include elements, which are difficult or impossible to materialise. Elements which are not materialised tend to be agreed upon during the brief and are negotiated by participants through metaplay. Wade exemplifies this idea:

> *Wade: It does go in a way that you can just…with some things…you know that they are coming, but they can't be materialised and you just have to filter it out. You have like a filter for your thoughts in that world and you real thoughts, so you know that a camping centre is not a Ukrainian prison…I mean it was kind of hard to create.*

Saler (2012) proposed that contemporary fantasy is focused on and always needs to begin with a logically sound other world, which may become spatial and embodied. Similarly, LARP performance needs a concrete world within which to build the fantasy experience. However, I would argue that it is the individuals' attitudes, rather than the material and spatial elements that are central to performing the social space of fantasy. While fantasy experiences require the fantasy world and place, these do not fully precede the performance, but merely create a set of supportive tools. The social space is always negotiated and co-created during the performance of fantasy, emerging in interaction as well as the relationships in and to it (following Relph 1980). May explains, *"You just have to understand things differently, in a specific way differently. After you go through that, it's really easy to relate to the game as being real."*

Borden (2001) proposes that space is first produced in the body, then projected outward in relation to the context and the objects in it, and only then is it experienced. Similarly, the place and world of LARP performance emerge as an attitude of and relation to the body. Moreover, as it becomes evident, a central part of a LARP performance is conscious "conceiving" of space (following Lefebvre 1991), that is, individuals are actively negotiating and structuring the knowledge and representation of the social space. While this is true of any social space (as Zukin 1991 and Borden 2001 have shown), the process is not usually actively acknowledged by individuals.

Some previous research proposes that fantasy experiences create "non-places", as they are connected to the idea of Utopia (Bammer 1991; Barba 1995), and are presented as being based only on signs and having the possibility to be re-created in any context (Venturi, Izenour, and Brown 1972). However, fantasy performance seems to create a much more clear and permanent feeling of place, even though the experience is ephemeral. In fact, the experience of place is in many ways stronger than its counterparts in everyday life through its shared meaning and strong identity created through the clarity of the performance, thus

helping momentarily resolve the problem of placelessness suggested by Relph (1980) and Zukin (1991).

Overall, the fantasy place and world create the social space of the fantasy performance, which is experienced by individuals to be very real, yet acknowledged by them as not being reality. The shared performance helps bring to life both the fantasy world and place, creating conceived and lived space (following Lefebvre 1991), that is, the space as structured and experienced. Propping, however, only seems to aid the performance of the fantasy place, thus allowing perceived space (following Lefebvre 1991), that is, space materially experienced, to emerge. The fantasy social space is perceived by individuals to be very clear, safe, and controlled, as well as to have a strong identity, which makes it easier to understand and approach than everyday life. *"When all the elements and characters, the whole structure really is so clear, it's easy to react to,"* Rose explains.

8.3.2 Negotiating Social Spaces of Fantasy and Reality

Fantasy allows the performance of that which is normally seen as unbelievable or unchangeable. In everyday life, the real self and the reality frame gained through social performance are naturalised through their continuous performance in everyday life, which greatly limits individuals by seeming to them to be indestructible (following Goffman 1959; Butler 2004). The fantasy performance allows individuals to renegotiate and exceed such limitations of reality that are normally perceived as irreducible, unchangeable, and essentially impossible (following Goffman 1959; Butler 2004). These include both physical limits and social limits (Goffman 1959).

The renegotiation of the limits of reality starts with overcoming physical impossibilities, such as performing in a world filled with magical creatures and witchcraft, or one, in which the laws of physics are different. Dawn describes excitedly that *"it's really fun to play supernatural things because you can't do that in normal life […] like you can't really do anything with a wand in the real world."* More importantly, individuals also need step over their own norms, morals, values, and hierarchies, or their social limits, as Goffman (1959) would put it. Rose gives an example: *"I had to act in that way… in a different way. I mean in a way that goes against my own norms and stances. It's interesting."* In order to stay true to the fantasy performance, LARPers need to take on a different set of norms and momentarily let go of their own understanding of reality. The break and renegotiation of limits is supported by all of the performers taking the structure seriously, as well as aiding one another's experience.

In addition to its support, transparency, and security, the fantasy performance is able to encourage the possibilities of breaking norms because it imposes no sanctions outside its very limited context: *"If you fuck up, it's just the one weekend that goes south,"* says Wade. The performed social space is only momentary and removed from everyday life physically, temporally, and consciously. Everything that happens in the fantasy frame is perceived to belong to that world, which supports the distance to everyday reality. Moreover, as I described in the previous

section, the performance is open and safe, as it is completely transparent among its participants, yet strictly closed off from the outside and controlled by participants in time and space. Hence, breaking limits does not involve many repercussions for the individual.

The fantasy performance allows individuals to do things they normally would not do or even things that would normally be forbidden. In fact, LARPers seem to thoroughly enjoy stepping over normative and moral limits, as it creates freeing aspects to the performance of fantasy. *"It's so great to get away from the normal world and do something completely different!"* Chase exclaims. May adds that *"you get to leave the normal world behind […] and like not stress and worry about things…shut the phone off for the whole weekend."* Individuals can thus distance themselves from their everyday reality, and have a break from it. A great deal of previous research has presented fantasy as an escape from everyday life (e.g., Belk and Costa 1998; Kozinets et al. 2004; Jenkins, Nixon, and Molesworth 2011). However, as I will discuss in more detail in the next chapter, I would suggest that LARP never allows full escape from reality, as reality is always negotiated and kept in mind.

While a different world is performed, reality always remains as part of the performance: *"reality is still always there"* (Chase). Similar to my findings and discussion on the performance of the self and interaction, LARPers perceive their surrounding social space to take on a dual nature during fantasy performance. *"When you're LARPing then it's not just LARPing but you really live it, but you also sort of always know that you're just LARPing. You consciously know, but also pretend that you're in a different world,"* Peg explains. Individuals interacting with fantasy are continuously conceiving and perceiving two social spaces: one of everyday life and one of fantasy. This negotiation is done through metaplaying.

Through distancing themselves from their reality and contrasting it with the social space of the fantasy world, individuals are able to reflect on the rules and norms that govern their lives. Hope describes how performing fantasy worlds that are structured differently from reality let her *"see how things are structured […] and what limits me."* It is an almost a "have your cake and eat it" kind of situation, as individuals broaden their experience through learning about the norms and limitations that normally structure their lives, but are able to choose to disregard negative aspects and take on only the positive sides of experiences and emotions.

> *During the debrief, a player pointed out that he always has something that he likes and doesn't like in his LARP experiences. And he always finds something to take away from the game and something to leave behind. It seems that LARPs allow us to take the positive experience without their negative elements or side effects. (Field note)*

Kozinets et al. (2004) propose that fantasy creates heterotopia, that is, "a place that is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible" (Foucault 1986, p. 25). Foucault (1986) explains that while Utopia is a site with no place or relation to reality, heterotopia is a real place of enacted Utopia. This is outside any real place, but, at the same time, its location can be indicated, juxtaposing multiple spaces in one. Following these ideas Kozinets et al. (2004), describe individuals experiencing the sensation

of being elsewhere than and distant from reality when interacting with fantasy experiences. Something similar happens in LARP. However, it is important to stress Foucault's (1986) original description of heterotopia as *multiple* spaces, which involves spaces mirroring one another. Foucault's (1986) heterotopia bears similarity to the idea of aesthetics as mimesis, as both discuss a mirror to society that exposes underlying structures and thus allows self-reflection. LARPers, however, simultaneously experience being in reality and fantasy space, thus negotiating multiple frameworks in their performance. Following the idea of art as experience (Turner 1982; Conquergood 1998), I propose that fantasy does not involve mirroring life, but rather dual, parallel performance, as I will show in more detail in the discussion section of this chapter.

8.3.3 Discussion: Fantasy and the Carnival

It would seem that LARP is in many ways similar to Bakhtin's (1984) concept of carnival, which he describes both as a medieval phenomenon and a tendency in literature and entertainment. The carnival is dramatic and embodied, but it is neither a performance for an audience, nor a part of "real life", just like the fantasy performance of LARP. While sharing many similarities, the fantasy world also presents significant differences to the idea of the carnival, giving light to the former. I discuss these similarities and differences in detail below.

Bakhtin (1984) described the carnivalistic world as having four defining categories. Firstly, the carnival encourages familiar and free interaction between people unlikely to come together in everyday life. LARP performance also encourages a similar type of interaction among individuals that do not usually know one another in everyday life. The interaction is based on shared and familiar elements, often borrowed from popular culture. However, LARP does not allow free interaction, as the performance is bound by very strict and clear rules created specifically for the particular world, interaction, and character being portrayed.

Secondly, Bakhtin (1984) describes the carnival to welcome, without any consequences, behaviour that is normally viewed to be eccentric and unacceptable. This category also partially applies to LARP performance. As I have already shown, the fantasy world allows action and interaction that may normally be viewed as unacceptable by society or intimidating to the individual, bearing no consequence to their everyday self. However, once again, such behaviour is very limited to the structure of the LARP world and the specific LARP character. As such, LARP only allows very specific ways of stepping beyond the norms and limits of everyday life.

Thirdly, Bakhtin (1984) proposes that the familiar and free format of the carnival allows elements that are normally separate to be united. This includes elements such as the sacred and profane, the young and old, and high and low culture. As a result, the social structure has no hierarchy, and washes out any distinction between actors and spectators. The LARP performance does technically allow the combination of normally juxtaposed elements, as a LARP can hypothetically be created around any theme or combination of themes. The LARP

performance, however, does not result in a loss of hierarchy, structure, or roles. In fact, quite the opposite occurs, as hierarchy is often more pronounced than in everyday life. This may be an effect of the egalitarian cultural context of the study. Nevertheless, the structures, which may be different to ones faced by individuals in their everyday lives, are clarified and reinforced through their performance of the fantasy context. Moreover, the roles of actors and spectators, while performed by the same individuals, are clearly differentiated.

Fourthly and lastly, Bakhtin (1984) purports the carnival to allow sacrilegious events to occur without punishment. By sacrilegious events, Bakhtin (1984) refers to blasphemy, profanity, and the parody of things that are sacred. In the medieval context, such things were ungodly and thus unthinkable for people in their real lives. The carnival then created a context without norms or prohibitions, where sacrilegious performance was accessible to everyone. In a similar way, the fantasy performance of LARP involves many elements of parody and exaggeration, which would seem odd or prohibited in everyday life. LARP allows individuals to step over and question norms, which normally seem unbreakable. However, the LARP context is not without norms or prohibitions, as it presents a very strict and clear structure for performance. Fantasy performance of LARP thus allows individuals to step over and ridicule norms by allowing them to momentarily perform within a *different set* of limitations.

Bakhtin's (1984) carnival is a second life for its participants, which stands free, unbound, and sacrilegious in contrast to their normal, official, serious, and gloomy everyday life, which is ruled by a strict hierarchic order. Both carnival and everyday life are legitimate, but the two are separated by strict temporal borders, as the carnival takes over public space at specific limited times (Bakhtin 1984; Fiske 1989). The carnival is a Utopia with its own laws that turns the patterns of everyday life upside down in order to disrupt reality and make up for society's prohibitions by allowing their fulfilment (Jackson 1981; Bakhtin 1984; Armitt 1996). Here, ideas and truths are unstable and continuously under question, resulting in a momentary loss of self and an evasion of ideology (Bakhtin 1984; Fiske 1989). The aim of the carnival is to allow individuals to transgress social norms by going against them and becoming aware of disorder (Agnew 1986; Bakhtin 1984). However, the carnival's nature is idealistic and deceptive (Jackson 1981; Bakhtin 1984). The carnival temporarily suspends everyday problems and shows the potential of another world, but normally results in neutralising desires and reinforcing existing patterns of life, as the former seem too outrageous, unstructured, and scary to the participants. The carnival thus becomes a form of social control (Fiske 1989).

It becomes apparent that LARP shows significant differences from the idea of the carnival, which can help us understand how fantasy is experienced in its contemporary performance. The LARP performance does not create a second life, nor does it create a free and unbound topsy-turvy world. This performance of fantasy rather presents a *different* world with norms and structures *different* from everyday life that are experienced as the character's life and not one's second life. LARP is further separated from everyday life not only in terms of time, but also in terms of space. The result is not a double life, but multiple frames the individual

performs in simultaneously. The fantasy experience thus exists *in addition to* and not *in contrast with* experience of reality.

An important difference from the carnival is the fact that the structure of fantasy performance is experienced by its participants to be *clearer* than that of everyday life. The social space and role that the individual takes on through the performance of fantasy as well as the corresponding habits, norms, and interaction are very specific and their meanings shared among all performers. Individuals are required to step over physical and social limitations natural to them, but do not become free of a structure. They rather gain a different reflective view on it, allowing them to become more aware of their own social structure and their role in it. Consequently, the context of fantasy performance is not free, but it is free*ing*.

I believe this difference of fantasy performance and the carnival could be at least partially attributed to the change in cultural and social structuring. In contrast to Bakhtin's (1984) world of strict order, contemporary life can rather be described as fragmented and changing, lacking clear structure and guidelines for individuals (following Firat 1991; Baudrillard 1972; Firat and Venkatesh 1995; Levy 1998). Hence, instead of seeking freedom from structure, individuals seek structure to be freed of chaos.

Through the clarity and narrowness of content, LARP performance seems to allow the emergence of what Badiou (1990) called theatre truth, that is, knowledge that captures an aspect of culture and is only available during the aesthetic performance. The sharing of ephemeral truths further aids in the creation of a collective and its social structure (Badiou 1990). Theatre truth should be clearly differentiated from Walton's (1990) fictional truths, by which he refers to the propositions, which are taken as truth in the context of fantasy and on which a fantasy world is based. These only hold true and are relevant in the fantasy context, while theatre truth exceeds it.

Badiou (1990) believed that contemporary culture is too concerned with the freedom of opinions. In consequence, culture is cluttered with useless elements and details, making it too complex and ambiguous. Through theatre truth, aesthetic performance has the potential to create shared thought of everyone, which rebels against the opinion of everyone. Theatre allows us to capture the vanishing and ephemeral nature of truth, allowing us to gain at least momentary understanding of it (Badiou 1990). The fantasy performance of LARP does not require its performers to believe its world to be real, but to take it seriously and share its meanings in order for it to be real and authentic for its temporally and spatially limited performance, thus creating theatre truth, or perhaps rather *fantasy truth*. Fantasy truth seems to support the performance of the fantasy world as well as the characters and interactions within it, creating a fleeting moment of clarity in a chaotic and fragmented world.

8.3.4 Discussion: Levels of Reality in Fantasy Performance

The break in the continuity of reality and restructuring of social space into a parallel fantasy world become central to the performance of fantasy. As space and

time of performance are intrinsically tied into one another, the previously described disruption in lived time supports this break. Just like the performance of self and interaction in fantasy experiences, the performance of the social structure of fantasy would also seems to involve a multiplicity of perspectives, as individuals make a conscious effort both during and after a LARP to keep the worlds of reality and fantasy apart.

Paskow (2004) theorised that individuals gain a dual consciousness in interacting with make-believe: one in fiction as engaged and aware, and the other outside the fiction as passive and self-aware. He continues that we never lose consciousness during this interaction and are constantly reminded that what we are engaged in is not real. However, Paskow does not elaborate on how individuals experience or use this duality in their performances. Similarly, Walton (1990) hints at a partially overlapping duality of fantasy and reality involved in the experience of fantasy, but does not elaborate on the process or describe how the two interact. Moreover, Tolkien (1964) described engaging with fantasy as seeing two places at once. Schechner (1988, 2006) and Turner (1982) also described two entities, proposing that social and aesthetic performances form an elaborate feedback system. Meanings flow from one to the other and back, with each performance underlying the development of the other. In aesthetic performances, individuals are then seen to simultaneously be aware of reality *and* fantasy, but it remains unclear how individuals perceive and perform this duality.

Following similar ideas, McAuley's analysis of theatre space hints at two structures being negotiated from the subjective point of view of participants' experiences: everyday reality and fantasy reality. McAuley (2000) explains that theatre performance results in the problematisation of reality and fantasy, as both are proposed as possibilities, but neither is completely realised. Individuals end up with a dual consciousness in a shadowy frontier between reality and unreality. However, in describing the space as used in theatre performance, McAuley (2000) proposes three realities, which are continuously present and negotiated:

1. Social reality, which encapsulates the physical space and the social context of everyday performance perceived as reality. Lin (2013) explains that social reality always needs to be present, as portraying an action in the imaginary world requires you to do it in the physical world as well. This level could thus be equated to Goffman's primary framework. Here, McAuley (2000) stresses the division of space for the audience and the actors. Kennedy (2009) elaborates that the performing space and watching space are often far apart, supporting the division of the roles, and also making it difficult for spectators and actors to read each others' reactions and body movements.

2. Presentation reality, which consists of the stage space as well the theatre performance conceived and perceived in it. This reality is defined by tensions, as it is simultaneously both physical and fictional, real and not real.

3. Fictional reality, which consists of the fantasy space and performance in it. McAuley (2000) points out that this reality exists at the mercy of the other two, the social and the presentational realities, as it is not viable on its own. Fine (1983) agrees and believes the fantasy frame to be inaccessible to the individual, only to be perceived through the other frames.

It is important to note that McAuley's (2000) analysis focuses on a very traditional theatre space that results in a very clear spatial divide between spectators and actors. Unlike theatre, LARP takes place in a unified space, creating no physical distance or hierarchical difference between spectators and actors. From this perspective, LARP spaces are closer to everyday life, as they include no physical midway structure, such as McAuley's (2000) presentational reality.

Fine (1983) describes fantasy experiences in a very similar way to McAuley's (2000) analysis of theatre space. Building on Goffman's (1974) frame analysis, Fine (1983) studied individuals' engagement in fantasy frames through the context of tabletop role-playing games. He concluded that the three following frames are negotiated as people engage with fantasy worlds:

1. The primary framework. This involves the individuals' commonsense understanding of the real world and their real self within it. Fine points out that this frame does not depend on the others for existence.

2. The game context. This frame is the structure of the game that is governed by a complicated set of rules and constraints and can go beyond what is physically possible in the primary framework. The game frame involves the individuals' player selves that manipulate the character through knowledge of the structure of the game.

3. The fantasy context. This frame involves the fantasy world and the individuals as the characters of that world. Fine stresses that individuals can never reach this frame.

According to Fine (1983), engaging in a fantasy context results in the individual enacting three frames and corresponding three personae, continuously switching between the real self, the player self, and the character self. The three are separate from one another, and have their own structure and meanings. The individual needs to block out the information in possession of the other frames and identities in them when engaging with a particular self. For instance, while taking on the character, one would need to block out all information known to the real self and the surrounding everyday world as well as the player self, the game context, and the rules involved in these.

In his study, Fine heavily relied on Goffman (1959, 1974), who also famously explored the performance of different roles, although in the context of everyday

life. Goffman explains that individuals have multiple roles that they take on according to the situation at hand. The roles have their own requirements, characteristics, and structures. Fine (1983) extends this notion of having multiple roles, pointing out that we can also have multiple selves in one situation. Fine (1983) builds on Goffman's (1974) frame analysis by showing that frames are not stable, but engrossment in them rather bears an oscillating character, meaning that individuals continuously change frames and associated roles.

It is important to note that Goffman himself was unsure how to define fantasy through his frame analysis. Moreover, he believed that fantasy frames involve transformed activity that is free from any needs outside of those frames. Such frames are unserious mimicry of other, more productive performances and individuals engage in them only for the purpose of immediate satisfaction. Consequently, Goffman believed fantasy to be completely out of touch with reality and practical use. As I have shown throughout this chapter, this is not necessarily the case. Therefore, while I base some of my discussion on Goffman's work, I also stray from many of his ideas.

Fine's and McAuley's conceptualisations could be applied to the fantasy performance of LARP in the following way:

1. Being in real, everyday life involves performing social reality or the primary framework.

2. Being at a LARP before and after its actual performance, being briefed and debriefed, understanding the materials and rules, as well as being OFF-game comprises the performing of the presentational reality or the game context.

3. Performing the actual LARP, that is, taking on the fantasy character and entering the fantasy context in the fictional reality or the fantasy context.

However, if there are indeed three frames or three levels of perceived reality, why does the fantasy experience involve not a trinity of consciousness, but a duality, as my data clearly outlines. Moreover, there are a number of issues surrounding fantasy frames that are left unexplained by Fine (1983). Firstly, while Fine presents each frame as having its own structure and meanings, he believes that examining the fantasy characters and their culture is pointless, as this forces culture away from its behavioural moorings and is not accessible to us. My data, however, alludes to the idea that the fantasy context becomes real and serious to its performers, meaning that it deserves our full attention. Secondly, Fine points out that the notion of negotiating multiple personae in fantasy gaming can be extended to everyday life. However, he does not expand this idea or discuss the experience in terms of its effects on the individual's identity and its use in everyday life. Moreover, Fine does not discuss the possibility of the transfer of emotion or experience among frames as they are negotiated, which clearly emerges as part of my interviewees' experiences. Thirdly, Fine seems to focus on the physically possible when defining reality and the primary framework, omitting aspects of

social reality that were stressed by Goffman (1974) to be as important as physical reality from the perspective of individual experience. I explore these unanswered questions next, as I bring together all the findings of this chapter.

8.4 Discussion: Experiencing Fantasy

I conclude the chapter by proposing how fantasy performance is experienced by individuals (visualised in Picture 13). First, I present a frame structure for fantasy performance, after which I discuss the roles and performances that take place within fantasy. Subsequently, I propose how performance of fantasy can be defined, describing the main characteristics of the experience. Lastly, I show how fantasy allows individuals to invest in their own realities and their real selves.

Picture 13 "Frames of Performance," acrylics on canvas, 100x100cm

8.4.1 Frames of Fantasy Performance

According to Goffman (1974), performance is always framed, building from one's primary framework to the situation at hand. Frames are always situated within or build on larger frames, which are situated in larger frames, etc., creating a hierarchy. Fine (1983) builds on this idea, proposing that experiencing fantasy takes place in the oscillation of three frames – the primary frame, the game frame, and the fantasy frame – with the latter always situated within the former.

In addition to everyday performance, Goffman (1974) also analysed the framing of theatre performance. He proposed that performing the make-believe world of theatre could be seen as a mere keying if only actors were involved. However, the audience complicates this, as they continuously acknowledge the fantasy of performance, putting aside ordinary understanding and willingly maintaining their unknowing. Goffman stresses that aesthetic performance is much more than a keying, but does not elaborate on this idea.

Schechner (1985) discusses frames of aesthetic and social performance in his analysis of performance in theme parks. He proposes the following structure of frames, in which each following frame is encapsulated by the previous frame:

A. The indicative "as is" world. This could be described as the real world, as perceived by spectators and actors.

B. The subjunctive "as if" world. This is the make-believe world, in which actors exist as their performed characters.

AB. The performance subjunctive. This is the make-believe world (B) that spectators enter, while keeping consciousness of the real world (A).

Schechner further points out that as individuals enter the frame AB, the frame transforms from being encapsulated by frames B and A to itself encapsulating the whole performance. In the context of the make-believe world, the framing thus takes the following form: AB – A – B – AB (see Figure 2). It remains unclear how this restructuring process takes place and is experienced by individuals.

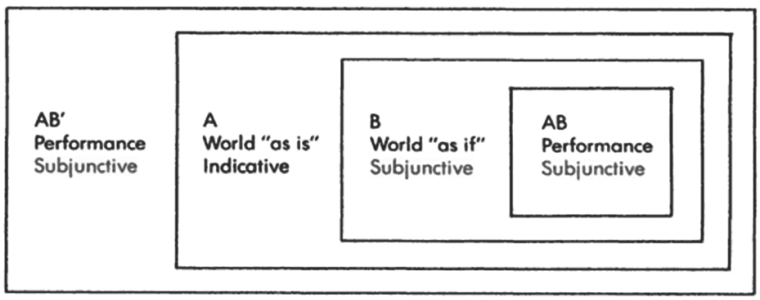


Figure 2.7

Figure 2 Schechner's (1985, p. 93) frames of performance

Schechner further points out that as individuals enter the frame AB, the frame transforms from being encapsulated by frames B and A to itself encapsulating the whole performance. In the context of the make-believe world, the framing thus takes the following form: AB – A – B – AB (see Figure 2). It remains unclear how this restructuring process takes place and is experienced by individuals.

A few important details in Schechner's work can aid in building on Goffman's and Fine's analyses of fantasy performance, as well as help understand the juxtapositions in my own findings. Firstly, Fine talks about continuous oscillation of frames and roles while engaging in fantasy performance, which is somewhat inconsistent with my data. Schechner points out that individuals form a frame that is aware of both frames, which is precisely what my interviewees describe experiencing. Secondly, Fine's frames have a clear hierarchy of one being within the other, just as Goffman suggests. However, Goffman also points out that aesthetic performance is more than a keying. Schechner's work, while not directly building on Goffman, tries to answer this by proposing that the "smallest" frame becomes the "biggest" frame. However, as I mentioned, it remains unclear how this process is negotiated in performance.

Building on these ideas, I want to propose the following structure for fantasy performance. The structure is based on Fine's (1983) work, but builds on it in a number of central ways. I describe the frames in detail below.

- Reality frame
- Participatory frame
- Make-believe frame

The performance of fantasy always involves the *reality frame*, which corresponds with Goffman's and Fine's primary framework. As Goffman (1974) stresses, any performance is always happening in reality and it is thus always anchored in reality. The *reality frame* in fantasy performance includes that, which is perceived by individuals to be everyday life and hence real, both in physical and social terms. The role that is taken on in this frame is one's self. For the sake of clarity, I will include any situation-specific keyings, such as being in a specific crowd, city, game, etc., into this larger frame. From Goffman's perspective, these would build on the primary framework to construct the specific performance. However, these would also take form in quite "regular," hierarchical keyings of performance, meaning the difference in frame or role would most likely not be felt by individuals, but still be perceived as reality and their "real" self (following Goffman 1974). Including an analysis of these frames would also defeat the purpose of understanding the subjectively perceived fantasy performance. I am thus assuming all performance perceived as reality to be a part of the *reality frame*.

Once the individual engages in the fantasy performance, they enter the *participatory frame*. This frame involves the transformation of performance and its meanings from reality for the specific context of fantasy. The participatory frame thus guides and structures the performance of the *make-believe frame,* which I discuss a little further on in the text. This guide and structure is not the performance of non-reality, but involves acknowledging one's engagement in fantasy

performance, as well as any materials, rules, and limits on which the fantasy performance is based. In LARP, the participatory frame takes place once individuals start performing the LARP, and includes the general LARP rules as well as the game-specific rules, limitations, and structures, which are based on the provided materials and briefs. The *participatory frame* requires an individual to take on the role of a participant. This role is heavily anchored in reality and thus largely perceived as an extension of the self. As I will explain below, the participant role is never active on its own, but rather supports and enables the make-believe frame and role, never becoming a part of these. At the same time, the participatory frame becomes the rim of the whole activity, that is, how the activity is perceived from the outside as placed in reality. As the frame involves the extension of self and reality, its status in reality as the rim of the fantasy performance could explain the often-proposed idea of reality and fantasy blurring.

The actual performance of fantasy emerges in the *make-believe frame*. This frame involves performing the fantasy world and the role of the fantasy character, which are perceived by individuals to be distinctly different and distant from the real world and the real self. The *make-believe frame* does not involve an unreachable fantasy world and character, as Fine (1983) suggested, but rather the self's interpretation of these, which are based on the structures of the *participatory frame*. It is therefore yet another keying of performance, but an extreme and very conscious one, which aims to perform an other within an other world. The aim becomes to re-key (at least hypothetically) not just one context or performance, but *the entire* primary framework, which is not naturalised in any way. Consequently, the individual becomes highly aware of the performance of the frame and the role. This supports the idea of a doubleness of performance, as well as its spatiality and temporality that I suggested earlier. Reality is re-keyed completely, and it thus requires its own time and space. Moreover, unlike Schechner (1985) suggested, I do not believe that make-believe envelops the reality frame, but rather becomes parallel to it.

All three frames are at play when an individual is engaged in performing fantasy. The frames take place in the same space and time, and involve different limitations and expectations for performance. Based on my findings, individuals do not oscillate between these frames and roles, as Fine (1983) proposes. Individuals rather become continuously aware of the frames of their performance, and are able to switch between interacting in different frames at will, as I will show.

McAuley (2000) implied that the three frames of performance are parallel and similar, while Fine (1983) presented a very hierarchical structure of smaller frames within larger frames that follows Goffman's ideas. The three frames do indeed build on one another, as the make-believe frame requires the participatory frame, which, in turn, requires the reality frame. However, this does not make one frame superior to any other. Moreover, while there is no dominance, the frames are of different breadth.

I propose the three fantasy frames to relate to one another in the following way (visualised in Figure 3). The reality frame and make-believe frame are equal in breadth, as the latter aims to re-key the former in its entirety. Moreover, neither resides within the other, but the two are parallel, because they are performed as

different and distant to one another. The participatory frame is much smaller than the other two, merely keying performance for the specific situation. It resides within the reality frame, but also connects to the fantasy frame, as it forms the basis of its performance. The participatory frame functions as an in-between, connecting and juggling the reality and make-believe frames. Therefore, reality enables make-believe, but does not encompass it.

Individuals become hyperaware of the frames of fantasy performance and sustain this awareness because the aim of the performance is to create a world and a character within it that are very different from one's real world and self. As the fantasy performance does not come naturally, individuals engaging in it need to be very conscious of their thoughts, emotions, and actions, negotiating and contrasting what they are supposed to be doing with what they would naturally do. Individuals do not just focus on the very specific situation, but are challenged to restructure their whole environment and being. This process is supported by the clear and strictly structured nature of fantasy performance. Moreover, the participatory and make-believe frames are planned or provided to individuals in a straightforward manner. Hence, belief in the fantasy emerges through acknowledging the rules and norms of the fantasy social space, which often follows logic familiar to participants. The striving away from one's self and reality underlines the differences between the roles and between the frames, moving away from the reality frame and role towards that which is beyond reality and the symbolic order. Next, I take a closer look at the roles taking place during fantasy performance.

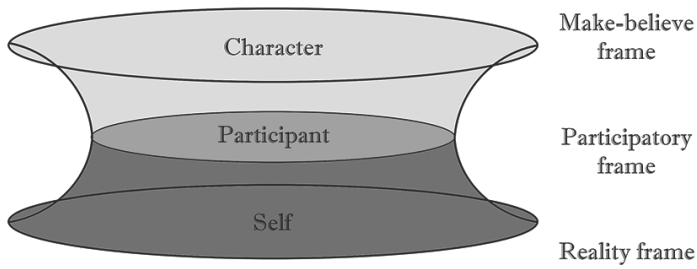


Figure 3 Frames in Fantasy Performance

8.4.2 The Roles and Performances of Fantasy

The roles of actor and spectator have often been used as metaphors in consumer research. The consumer has usually been seen as a spectator, while the marketer or

producer is seen as the actor. The understanding of the spectator-actor relationship has been quite a traditional one, with the former being passive, detached, and guided by the active performers (Deighton 1992; Firat and Dholakia 2006). Recent research has, however, suggested that, in the fragmented postmodern culture, consumers also become actors, as they are active in their contexts (Moisio and Arnould 2005; Firat and Dholakia 2006). Consumer research has further suggested that spectating and acting correspond with consumption and production, with the two now becoming the same process (Peñaloza 1998, 2001). Kozinets et al. (2004) argue that the actions and needs of producers and consumers are mutual and overlapping. They show that in contexts of fantasy consumption both roles take the form of "embedded consumer-producers where consumers produce producers' products at the same time and as much as producers consume consumers' consumption" (p. 671). Such ideas mirror Schechner's (1992) idea that there is no audience anymore, but rather all individuals become actors within reality.

In contrast with the above ideas, Abercombie and Longhurst (1998) suggested that individuals have become continuous spectators, and never actors, in media-saturated societies filled with representations. Individuals form a constant *diffused audience* of spectacles produced for them in their everyday lives. Performance in the context of a diffused audience involves direct and unmediated communication, can be both local and global, has little elements of ceremony, and can be both private and public. Such performance has very low levels of attention and involvement, and almost eliminates the distance experienced between spectator and actor. Following my observations of the context, I would maintain that the fantasy performance of LARP rather incorporates a *simple audience*, as individuals gather bodily, and the event is local and public (following the typology presented by Abercombie and Longhurst 1998).

Abercombie and Longhurst (1998) propose that, for the audience to truly engage and be active, we need to eliminate the difference between actors and spectators, not only close the distance between them. In a similar way, many theatre practitioners, such as Brecht (1965, 2000) and Grotowski (1968) propagated removing and erasing the division between spectator and actor, that is, destroying the "fourth wall", by letting the two encounter one another. McConachie (2008) and McAuley (2000) elaborate that the physical and psychological distance is problematic, as it can result in the actors and spectators becoming completely divorced, with meaning no longer being transmitted from one to the other. Following Goffman's (1974) ideas, I presume that eliminating the difference between these roles would result in performance among a homogenous group in the same frame. The question then is whether this group then comprises of actors (following Schechner 1992), spectators (following Abercombie and Longhurst 1998), or something in between (following Kozinets et al. 2004)?

I propose that none of these options are viable, at least in the context of fantasy performance. The elimination of the difference between actor and spectator, and thus, consequently between social and aesthetic performance, would be problematic, as it would break down the structures of reality and fantasy. If individuals interact on the same plane with roles from different frames, the frames would collapse into one frame. The character would become another self (follow-

ing Goffman 1959) and fantasy performance would turn into delusion (following Tolkien 1964). As I have shown, LARPers intentionally avoid this collapse of frames into one, as they seem to sense the psychological difficulties, such as breaking of the self and their understanding of reality, which would follow. The doubleness of roles is further supported by the disruption of lived time initiated by the performance of fantasy, which results in an experience of doubleness of the body (Wyllie 2005).

I suggested earlier that fantasy is a performance requiring the conscious awareness of and interaction in multiple frames. Performance is guided by the specific role that one takes in each frame (following Goffman 1974). Individuals maintain the difference strictly and also sustain a difference in the levels of interaction, that is, people interact only through either spectating or acting. This actively and consciously sustained difference in parallel performance seems to be at the very heart of the fantasy experience.

To keep the different roles and frames in check, that is, to be aware of, in control of, and continuously involved in them, I believe that individuals anchor the roles and frames in different types of performances. On the one hand, they are acting, that is performing only within one frame and focusing attention on that one frame, that is, the make-believe frame. Acting requires the role of an other and aims at an idealised performance, which can never be created perfectly. On the other hand, individuals are also spectating. Here, they have absolute knowledge that incorporates not only the frame being acted in, but also its limitations and rules, as well as its place in reality. This gives meaning to the acting through connecting it to performance outside the activity, that is the participatory and reality frames.

The two different types of performance are supported by a doubleness of temporality. I have shown earlier that the disruption of lived time results in an experience of the duality of temporality. While the temporality of reality performance becomes internally desynthesised and desynchronised from others through the disruption of lived time, the performance of fantasy involves explicitly synthesised and synchronised temporality. The former is linked to spectating, allowing connections of various meanings and clearer understanding of performances, while the latter is linked to acting, creating a very clear and focused performance.

It is central to note that merely being active does not make one an *actor* (as Moisio and Arnould 2005 and Firat and Dholakia 2006 imply), and being physically passive does not mean one is not engaged. It has often been taken for granted that if spectators are unresponsive, and if spectators and actors do not interact directly, the result is passive reception of a spectacle which involves no reflection, learning, or interaction (e.g., Grotowski 1968; McConachie 2008). However, a lack or response or physical interaction is not always a negative aspect. Kennedy (2009) points out that passivity does not mean inattention. An audience may not respond during the performance, but can be very reflective of it afterwards (Abercombie and Longhurst 1998; McConachie 2008; Kennedy 2009). Walton (1990) also briefly discusses spectating make-believe without participating in it. He elaborates that such engagement is more objective, which can be both a positive aspect (in allowing more reflection and comparison) and a negative aspect (in creating a less

intense, detailed, and emotional experience). All in all, acting or spectating becomes a matter or orientation in and focus of performance, not a result of activity or passivity.

If the separate processes of acting and spectating are kept in place, it would seem that fantasy performance does not break the so-called fourth wall, but actually *reinforces* it. Division is not necessary made in the same material and physical sense as in classic Western theatre, but the difference of acting and spectating remains strong in the performed roles and frames, as well as in the relationships between them. I describe these structures and relationships in detail below, summing them up in Figure 4.

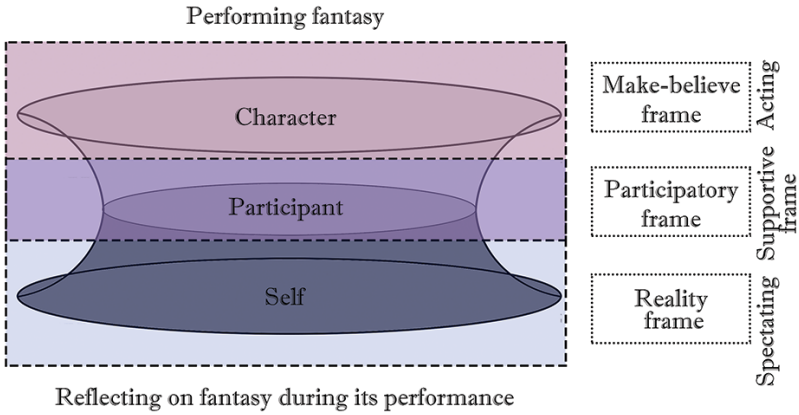


Figure 4 Roles and types of performance in fantasy

In the make-believe frame, the individual acts in the role of the character, which is perceived as being different to the self and limited by the structures of the make-believe world. In the reality frame, the individual spectates through the role of the self. The participatory frame and its participant role are merely supportive of both the spectating in reality and the acting in the make-believe. The participant is not consciously differentiated, as this role is still perceived as the self, nevertheless acquiring a more limited nature due to the smaller coverage of the frame. The participant is thus a transformation of the self, yet also inherently linked to the fantasy character, with the role only emerging in context of the other frames.

When performing fantasy, individuals focus on performing the character, which is distinctly different from the self, in the make-believe participatory frame. Action and interaction are reflexively synthesised internally and synchronised with other performers to create very clear performance. Simultaneously, individuals perform the supportive participatory frame, which opens the possibility of the make-believe frame and guides the latter throughout the experience. The reality frame is left behind, as it becomes too tedious and unnecessary. However, it remains represented by and acknowledged through the participatory frame, with this link allowing the return to reality at any point. The self and the participant are

experienced as facets of the same role of the self that spectates in fantasy performance, but is also anchored in reality.

Individuals mainly stay in the make-believe frame, but, when necessary, can step into the reality frame, either in interacting with others or on their own to contemplate the performance. Here, the individual does not perform the make-believe frame, but sustains a link to it through still performing the supportive participatory frame, as it is the basis of and thus extends into make-believe. Performance takes place in the reality frame, where spectating is active and is used to reflect on the fantasy during its performance, for instance, to fix and rework the participatory and make-believe frames more directly or to negotiate meanings of the make-believe frame. Because of the explicit nature of the temporality of the performance, it is desynthesised internally and desynchronised from one's surroundings.

The participatory frame thus sustains the link between the frames of fantasy and reality, but also disconnects them. The participatory frame makes possible the make-believe frame and continues to support it by creating its link to reality. Conversely, while in the reality frame, the participatory frame upholds the link to the make-believe frame. Consequently and unlike Fine (1983) suggested, one cannot be in the participatory frame (or, as he called it, the game frame) on its own, as the participatory frame is only present in supporting and guiding the performance happening in the other frames.

All things considered, it would seem that, while the performance of fantasy requires three frames, only two of them are performed at any one time. Individuals are either acting in the make-believe frame, supported by the participatory frame, or spectating in the reality frame, supported by the participatory frame. This creates the experience of the duality I have described and which Tolkien (1964) and Saler (2012) have theorised. Individuals continuously negotiate two parallel performances in performing fantasy, which takes form in different sets of frames and different *types* of performances that involve their own temporality and bodily role.

8.4.3 Defining the Experience of Fantasy

One of the central aims of this study is to define how individuals experience fantasy. I provide an answer to this question in this section, first reflecting on my data through the findings of previous research.

As I discussed in Chapter 2, various researchers have explored how individuals perceive fantasy through trying to resolve the paradox of belief. It is clear that some of the theories do not work well with my findings. Coleridge (1906), among others, proposed that belief is suspended or inactivated during interaction with fantasy. Similarly, in theatre and performance, Stanislavski (1989), for instance, promoted full belief in the character and fantasy world one is performing. From this perspective, individuals engage with fantasy as they would with everyday life, momentarily forgetting that fantasy is not real. Consumer culture research has alluded to similar ideas of individuals being deceived or deceiving themselves (e.g.,

Kozinets et al. 2004). In the context of LARP, however, such experiences would be problematic. People would be unaware of the fact that they are attending a game and thus be unable to follow the rules and structures of the LARP or differentiate real life from the fantasy experience, thus breaking their own and others' experiences.

Badiou (1990) suggests that fantasy does not suspend belief, but suspends the everyday state of affairs. This *does* seem to take place in LARP performance to an extent: individuals point out that fantasy performance allows them to step out of their everyday lives and forget their worries. However, individuals also continuously connect back to their own lives and can react to certain situations as themselves. Therefore, the state of affairs is not a complete suspension everyday life.

Boruah (1988) proposed that belief in reality and belief in fantasy have different existential commitments, with the latter lacking actuality and physicality. However, the LARP performance *does* depends on physicality, inner logic, and rationality. These are just as believable as their counterparts in everyday life, and need to be taken just as seriously.

Weston (1975, in Radford and Weston 1975) and his followers propose that belief in fantasy is created through connecting elements to their real-life counterparts. In theatre, Strasberg (1987) espoused a similar message: actors need to use their own experiences and emotions in performing a character. In LARP, individuals do indeed use personal experience and especially their knowledge of various popular culture media as a basis for the fantasy performance. However, they are also extremely wary of connecting or overlapping the two. Reality becomes a basis for fantasy performance, but fantasy performance is not its reproduction. LARPers try *not* to connect fantasy experiences and emotions to elements of their everyday lives in order to avoid nostalgia and negative effects of experiences. Moreover, individuals do not always respond to elements of fantasy performance in the way they would in everyday interaction, even if they base it on mundane experiences.

Some previous studies have further suggested that fantasy may be found in the gap between reality and imagination created by their interaction (following Tolkien 1964; Fine 1986; Traill 1996; Martin 2004; St. James, Handelman, and Taylor 2011). This is similar to Jackson's (1981) suggestion of fantasy becoming a frontier between reality and imagination. However, my findings show that, as a bodily and negotiated experience, the performance of fantasy does not lie between reality and imagination, but rather emerges as dual performance extending simultaneously toward reality and imagination. The two are negotiated through the particular structuring medium through which the fantasy emerges. In LARP, for instance, the participatory frame with the rules for the role-playing game acts as this mediating plane.

By taking on the make-believe frame and fantasy character, individuals consciously assume a different set of norms and limitations as well as ways of perceiving the world, both in physical and social terms. At the same time, individuals consciously retain their everyday norms and limitations. This is supported by a disruption in lived time and space, which results in a duality of temporality and

embodiment. As a result, performance of fantasy does not declare the norms of society at large to be irrelevant in the same way as Turner's (1969) liminality or Bakhtin's (1984) carnival. It rather allows individuals to take on a *different additional* set of physical and social limitations in the same setting. Firat (2001) has shown that for the individual, the difference between something being reality or fantasy lies in the orientation towards it, that is, in their feeling and thinking. This orientation seems to require the dual performance that I have described. Individuals do not suspend rationality and common sense that their everyday context imposes, but acquire another version, which they can perceive at the same time. This results in the creation of *fantasy truths* (see 8.3.3), on which the belief in fantasy is founded.

As I discussed in detail in my literature review, many researchers and theoreticians have argued that individuals live in a blur of fantasy and reality (Lacan 1991, Zizek 1997, and Baudrillard 1972, 1983, 1987; Kozinets 2001; Peñaloza 2001; Grayson and Martinec 2004; Rose and Wood 2005). However, the two are very clearly separated for the individuals performing them. It is important to note that how fantasy is experienced and how it is perceived from outside the activity are very different things. Goffman (1974) stressed the importance of differentiating between an activity's inner framing and its outer framing, that is, the rim. He pointed out that experiences are often described through the outer framing, even though there may be much more involved in them. The rim of the fantasy experience is in the participatory frame, and thus from an outsider's point of view it may seem to be no different from activity perceived as real. Fantasy performance is, nevertheless, subjectively experienced as different from reality in its dual, parallel performance. The result is a clear, carefully structured perception of both fantasy and reality simultaneously, not a blur of the two as previous literature has suggested.

I therefore propose that fantasy experiences can be described as a simultaneous conscious engagement in parallel performances; both the performance of reality and its complete transformation that is outside our symbolic order. This transformed reality is very strictly guided by the participatory frame of the performance, which not only constrains it but also makes it extremely well-defined. Fantasy is thus a type of performance that is different from any type of naturalised and normalised performance, as it involves a different attitude towards and a new interpretation of reality. Consequently, the same performance may be fantasy or reality, depending on the attitude that the performer takes toward it, and it may be impossible to differentiate the two experiences from an uninvolved point of view.

In addition to its particular frame structure, the following elements and characteristics are central to the performance of fantasy: the extreme clarity of performance, clichés and archetypes as the basis of performance, the shared quality of fantasy performance, and the non-naturalised essence of fantasy performance. I elaborate on these in more detail in the following.

8.4.3.1 Clarity

Fjellman (1992) has described contemporary culture to be filled with fragmentation, confusion, as well as feelings of fear and lack of power. As I described in

Chapters 2 and 3, contemporary culture provides us with endless choice, which can create considerable anxiety and a lack of understanding of one's world. Following similar ideas, Relph (1980) describes people as having become separated from their places: nothing is clear, and everything is beyond their control. What adds to the confusion is the fact that we simultaneously experience a lack of order as well as a need to experience reality in the same way as everyone else (Relph 1980). Urbany (2014) continues that individuals face complexity and uncertainty on a daily basis, which creates a demand for clarity, certainty, and confidence. Fantasy performance seems to be able to provide this.

Individuals perceive the fantasy performance to be extremely clear and much more well-defined than their everyday one. Moreover, the performance is explicitly clear to its performers, resulting in a reflexive inner consistency and synthesis of performance. This clarity was described by many to be the central and most important element of fantasy performance. This is in contrast with a majority of previous research, which has suggested fantasy experiences to allow and be driven by a loss of control and ambiguity (e.g., Belk and Costa 1998; Kozinets et al. 2004; Blanchette 2014), thus providing fantasy selves and fantasy worlds that are more free than real ones (Schechner 2006). Tolkien (1964) and Saler (2012) have, however, noted that the structures of fantasy worlds are always more comprehensive than those of the real, primary world. We cannot know everything there is to know about reality (Berger and Luckmann 1966), but we can about fantasy.

Blanchette (2014) has pointed out that a lot of research believes the central appeal of fantasy to be its easiness. Belk and Costa (1998) as well as Cramer (2010) similarly point out that fantasy contexts are driven by a need for more primitive, authentic, and easy experiences. Here, I must stress that clarity should not be confused with simplicity or lack of difficulty and complexity: my findings show that fantasy can be arduous or intricate, but, nevertheless, tends to provide much more well-defined parameters for performance than everyday life. Moreover, individuals do not take part in fantasy performances seeking clarity, but it is rather something that arises through participating in the performance.

Fantasy becomes a momentary, yet a very well articulated and stable point of comparison to one's everyday social reality, which is often unclear and fluctuating. The performance in the make-believe frame aims at something other, but it is based on the narrow structure of the participatory frame. Fantasy performance thus emerges as very understandable and controllable, creating something concrete and dependable for the individuals engaged in it.

8.4.3.2 Clichés and Archetypes

The clarity of fantasy performance is based on the well-defined frames and roles that are at play. These are created out of familiar elements that tend to be taken from popular culture, and are often archetypal, clichéd, and overly dramatic. Cohen and Taylor (1976) propose that archetypes work as a common stock of symbolic material, which are drawn from cultural scripts to form the "vocabulary and grammar of fantasy" (p. 95). Archetypes are typical and shared within a culture, creating instant understanding (Cohen and Taylor 1976; Bakhtin 1984;

Armitt 1996). Hume (1984) adds that archetypes give power to fantasy through reaching out to individuals and resonating with their emotional needs and concerns. The fantasy performance in the context of LARP is mostly based on elements of popular culture, thus drawing on a more globally shared subcultural set of archetypes, which could be said to form what Mackay (2001) names *imaginary entertainment environments*. Zizek (1992) points out that widespread contemporary mass culture has resulted in certain archetypes for fantasy itself, his example being the return of the living dead. These fantasy archetypes were clearly exemplified in my data.

An individual archetype may often seem a little tasteless and clichéd, but multiple archetypal elements together connect to our understanding of reality in creative and innovative ways (Eco 1973). In contrast to he precepts of common sense, clichés are not necessarily a negative thing to be avoided. According to Fiske (1989), clichés articulate a dominant ideology in a common-sense everyday manner. Because clichés require some mental work in order to correspond with one's understanding of reality, they force individuals to create the meaning they represent (Fiske 1989). Clichés and archetypes could be said to show us the norms of our culture.

Excessive and dramatic elements, on the other hand, communicate meaning that exceeds the norms of ideological control (Fiske 1989). When these norms are exposed, performance becomes a parody (Fiske 1989). We live out our lives with received notions of reality, which determine what we consider to be real and true. Parody can point out that this set of ontological presuppositions is at work and that it is open to re-articulation (Butler 2004). However, parody or clichés are not, in themselves, subversive, disruptive, or transgressive (Butler 1990). Dramatic and parodying elements allow us to analyse and conflict meanings that we believe to be evident and natural; they cause us to critique practical reason by denaturalising norms and detaching the individual from them, revealing the constructed nature of social structure (Butler 1990, 1993, 2004). All stable essences and fixed roles evaporate, and that which is unimaginable becomes possible (Badiou 1990). As I show in the next section, fantasy performance allows this through the dramatised use of clichés and archetypes.

This heavy reliance on clichés and archetypes based in popular culture suggests that fantasy performance is caught in the co-dependency of live and mediated performance characteristic of contemporary Western culture (following Auslander 2008). While an individual's engagement in fantasy is live, the performance emulates mediated performance and is only understandable through their links. Hence, bodily performance no longer equals live and non-mediated experience.

8.4.3.3 Shared Experience

To retain the clarity of its structures, the fantasy performance relies on the integrity of individuals to actually perform in the pre-decided manner that supports others' experiences. Performers must come together through their individual perspectives on fantasy to create shared fantasy that is explicitly synchronised

among them. In addition to upholding the structure, the shared fantasy allows the performance to be edited and developed in ways that enhance it far beyond any one individual's capability. The contact with other people brings together various (and possibly contradictory) interpretations, viewpoints, and opinions, thus requiring adjustment of each individual fantasy, which then feeds into the shared fantasy through the performance. The shared aspect of fantasy requires individuals to be more aware of its structures and causes the active editing of their understanding of the fantasy performance.

Individuals can always engage in fantasy by themselves (Walton 1990). However, as Zizek (1992) argues, all fantasy is already filled with other people's desires and opinions, that is, fantasy is always more than just the self and what it wants. Hence, fantasy is always already shared to an extent. Similar to my own findings, Saler (2012) theorised the importance of a shared fantasy. He proposed that, together, individuals can make the fantasy world seem more real by discussing its details, filling in and reconciling its various elements. By inhabiting a fantasy world communally, individuals are brought out of their own prejudices and preferences to create something new. Saler also stresses that interacting with fantasy communally allows individuals to relate fantasy and real worlds to one another. However, he does not explain how this happens beyond the idea that individuals are allowed to discuss meanings and structures of fantasy, which segues into discussion about society. I propose my ideas on this question in the next sections.

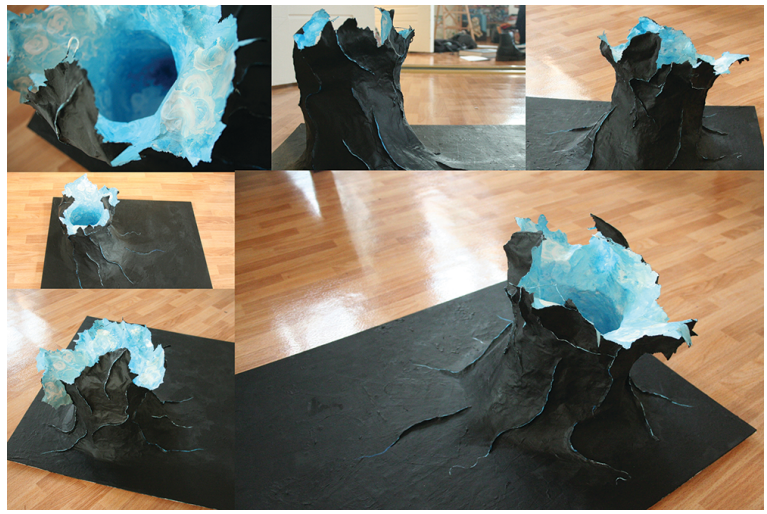
It would seem that fantasy allows us to tap into shared performances that create much more than any individual performance could. Individual fantasies form the basis of and are communally recombined into shared fantasy that allows new and unexpected meanings. Of course, it may be argued that meaning is assembled rather than shared (cf. Turner 1987; Schechner 1988), and the performance actually results in individual interpretations focused on a shared object (cf. Auslander 2008; Rowe 2008). In fact, both of these statements are true, as my findings show. The shared quality of fantasy is thus typical to our individualised and choice-ridden contemporary culture, as it is assembled from multiple individual perspectives. How could it be otherwise, if it is based in its cultural context? Nevertheless, in performing fantasy, individuals need to reach a very deep level of shared understanding of their roles and social structures in order to properly function in the performance. Hence, meaning is shared on a deeper level than during everyday interaction, but in an extremely articulated way, which stresses its made-up properties. This fabricated performance may nevertheless become a doorway to deeper understanding of one's reality and its structures, as I will show later on.

8.4.3.4 Non-naturalised Performance

Fantasy performance is not naturalised behaviour, and thus requires continuous awareness, guidance, and control. The non-naturalised fantasy performance emerges from the disruption of lived time and space (following Wyllie 2005; Fuchs 2010), which results is the explicit duality of temporality and embodiment.

We continually and seamlessly maintain reality through conversations and practice (Berger and Luckmann 1966), but fantasy is always out of place in this symbolic order because it does not feel real (Zizek 1992). Based on Lacan's idea of "objet petit a" (French for "small object a"), Zizek has proposed that fantasy is a type of reaction to a void or hole experienced in the continual, consistent performance of reality. Kirshner (2005) explains that the "object petit a" is an expression of the lack that is inherent in humans. By this, I believe he refers to that lost link between human and the world; the lack of truth and meaning that I discuss extensively in Chapter 3. Put simply, the "object petit a" is an element or performance that does not feel real and is outside of our understanding. Through this lack of reality, it creates a hole in our normally continuous experience of reality. Fantasy is then a way of dealing with this lack of reality, or, in other words, a lack of naturalised behaviour.

While the "objet petit a" is outside of our understanding of reality, it also helps to frame that same reality and thus allows us to perceive it in new ways (Zukauskaite 2008). Zizek (1992) explains that, as we move from reality, we place ourselves alongside it, seeing it from a distance and a skewed angle, which allows a clearer understanding of the totality. In LARP performance, the performance of the participatory frame could be seen as small object a, creating a hole in reality performance that allows us to perform fantasy and, at the same time, perform reality from afar (see Picture 14 for visualisation). The "object a" is thus very clearly structured, synthesised, and synchronised, and its performance is usually based on familiar elements that make it accessible and understandable. These elements are clichéd and parodying, and their performance is made excessive and dramatic, causing individuals to realise the constructed and malleable nature of reality (following Butler 1990, 1993; Fiske 1989). The performance thus ignites self-awareness and self-reflection. Consequently, there is no barrier between fantasy and reality to be imploded, broken or blurred, as performance of fantasy is found in a multiplicity of perspectives and attitudes toward reality.



Picture 14 "Objet Petit a," mixed media on board

Based on Lacan's work, Zukauskaite (2008) writes that fantasy consists of the relationship of the barred subject to the "objet petit a". The barred subject is the contemporary self that is an internally conflicted result of individualism, a confusion caused by the overwhelming amount of choice. As I have shown, fantasy does indeed answer the need for clarity created by contemporary culture. However, I would maintain that, from a subjective point of view, fantasy involves simultaneous engagement in two performances, which is actually lacking a self. I explain this idea in more detail in the last part of this chapter.

8.4.4 Investing into Reality through Fantasy

Fine (1983) proposed that the cultural structures of fantasy worlds are irrelevant to us as they are too far from our own moorings. Walton (1990) also argued that experiences and emotions of fantasy are not real, and thus have little influence on individuals. Mackay (2001), on the other hand, believes that fantasy provides patterns very similar to our own structures of culture and power, but exists in *imaginary entertainment environments*. He further proposes that, as a result, we can never truly escape our own structures within fantasy contexts. In line with Mackay's (2001) ideas, I have shown that fantasy performances are based on recombined familiar structures. Moreover, individuals become aware of said structures both within fantasy and within reality. Here, I elaborate on how this process takes place.

Tolkien (1964) proposed that fantasy can cause us to momentarily glimpse underlying reality or truth. Mar et al. (2006) have also noted that interaction with fictional worlds and characters can help individuals develop their social skills. Green and Donahue (2009) supported this notion in their study of reading fantasy literature, adding that interacting with fantasy evokes emotions and provides new perspectives, but does not necessarily provoke change. Hoogland (2002), Yanal (1999), as well as St. James, Handel, and Taylor (2011), have, among others, proposed that fantasy can show people possibilities, thus allowing them to develop ideas and desires, and envision new possibilities. In line with these ideas, Cohen and Taylor (1976) propose that self-consciousness, as a way of distancing, allows individuals to re-invest in their routines, engaging in what they call reality work, that is, building up stable constructions of the world with the help of various elements from one's surroundings.

Following these ideas, I suggest that fantasy performance allows individuals the possibility to re-develop and re-structure their own lives through awareness and comparison. Individuals do not seem to re-invest into their everyday life per se, but rather gain insight into what reality performance is made up of and how such performance can be changed (visualised through Picture 15).

It is important to note that the awareness and questioning of norms does not create transgressive action on its own (following Boruah 1988; Butler 2004; Green and Donahue 2009). The fantasy does not link to "real" action directly (as e.g., Walton 1978, 1990 and Boruah 1988 have suggested), but it can still have a great influence on how individuals perceive and perform in their everyday lives. Engag-

ing in fantasy performance can help resolve individuals' chaotic, incomprehensible social structures and their own place within them. As Lin (2012) wrote, the better a character is able to manipulate elements within an aesthetics performance, the more privileged they become within it. I believe the same idea is applicable here: the better an individual understands how performance works, the more aptly they can engage in it. Certain forms of fantasy performance may be more successful in sparking the processes that allow reality investment. I will elaborate on this in the next chapter, in which I describe differences in fantasy performances.

Picture 15 "Fantasy Pt. 3: Reality Investments," acrylics on canvas, 46x55cm

The structure of the fantasy performance is central in creating the awareness and reflection that allows individuals to gain new understanding of their world. Firstly, reality and make-believe frames are similar in breadth, connected by the much smaller, yet extremely clear participatory frame. This creates conscious distance between the larger frames and allows for their comparison and negotiation. Secondly, the make-believe frame is always based in the reality frame. As individuals need to completely transform their normal behaviour and its context, they become highly aware of both what they are changing and what this is being changed into, that is, reality and fantasy performance. The similarities and differences start becoming apparent, allowing people to be aware of, better understand, and question the structures that are in place in the fantasy performance and in their everyday life. I illustrate this in Figure 5.

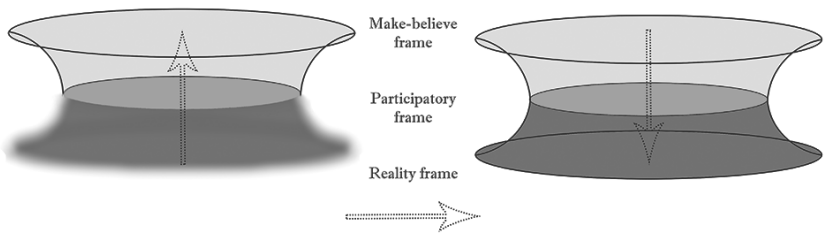


Figure 5 Reality investment

The temporality of fantasy performance also plays an important part in reality investment. To begin with, fantasy performance disturbs lived time, which results in reflexive awareness and self-awareness through explicit time (Fuchs 2010). Moreover, the make-believe frame involves an extremely synthesised and synchronised performance that is based on the structures of the participatory frame. The reality frame also involves reflexive performance, but it is desynthesised and desynchronised. A reflexive awareness and differentiation of various structures and performances is created, as both temporalities unfold in the past, present, and future (following Fuchs 2010). When fantasy performance ends, individuals are faced with resynthesising a personally consistent reality and resynchronising with the social processes of reality (following Wyllie 2005; Fuchs and Schlimme 2009). Through performing fantasy, individuals both reflect on their reality performance and gain a model for structuring performance through the participatory frame that forms the basis of make-believe. Consequently, individual can resynthesise and resynchronise lived time in new ways.

The main characteristics of fantasy that I described earlier further help support the process. The performance strives towards clarity and is based on familiar elements, creating a structure of performance that is easy to grasp and use for comparison. Moreover, the fantasy performance is shared on some level with others, which requires individuals to negotiate meaning in an articulated manner. Lastly, as performance is non-naturalised, individuals become highly aware and self-aware, distancing themselves from both the fantasy and reality performance. Cohen and Taylor (1976) proposed something similar; they believed that self-consciousness can create distancing, which allows us to undermine rules, reduce pressure from norms, and adjust roles and routines.

It is clear that fantasy experiences allow us to engage with, build on, and understand real and non-real constructs critically. The question therefore is how does this happen and of what use is it to us? Turner and Schechner (1988, 2006) proposed that fantasy and reality form a feedback system in the shape of an infinity loop, with the performance of one always underlining and mirroring the performance of the other (see Figure 1). In consumer research, St. James, Handelman, and Taylor (2011) propose the idea of chimerical agency, in which "the

consumer invokes, alters, and constructs the dual strands of reality and fantasy to create a realm of possibility that is a hybrid of the two" (p. 647). Put simply, they propose that by mixing fantasy and reality, individuals create a realm of possibility for themselves. My findings would suggest that something similar takes place, but this is not accomplished through mirroring or mixing.

Tolkien (1964) and Saler (2012) theorised that we may need secondary worlds (i.e. fantasy worlds) to comprehend the primary one (i.e. reality). Saler (2012) continues that secondary worlds become safe arenas for individuals to reflect on reality and themselves, as well as see the real world as amenable to revision. This, in turn, allows envisioning of social and personal change, and the discussions of tabooed issues. In Saler's (2012) opinion, such fantasy is ideal from a modern point of view, as it allows individuals to be delighted without being deluded, thus combining rationality with imagination. He does not, however, explain or theorise as regards how these processes take place from an individual's point of view, nor does he discuss their consequences.

Zizek (1992) wrote that fantasy lets us look at reality awry, that is, from a distorted angle, which makes reality seem distant, yet also much more clear. Basing his ideas on Lacan's "petit objet a," Zizek explains that fantasy results in individuals seeing two realities: the "normal" reality and the "distorted" reality. This does not allow individuals to find order, but rather to find understandable patterns in reality, which helps them deal with the chaos. I suggest that this is exactly what happens in fantasy performance through the application of a very clear participatory frame onto parallel performances. This by no means simplifies or restructures reality, but puts it into a more coherent perspective. Urbany (2014) has suggested that individuals lack a basic understanding of how to deal with confusion in contemporary culture, how to make decisions and choices within it. Fantasy performance seems to be able to provide the tools to relieve such confusion.

I propose that fantasy performance is based on the simultaneous performance of both fantasy and reality that leads to their comparison and thus a clearer understanding of both. Central to the negotiation is the mediation of the parallel performances. This happens through the smaller and well-defined participatory frame, which seems to function almost like a filter in clarifying the larger reality and make-believe frames. First, the filter allows the emergence of the performance in the make-believe frame. This performance is based on the reality frame, but is re-keyed in its entirety based on the participatory frame, thus resulting in clear structures and norms. Then, as fantasy is being performed, individuals gain distance to the reality frame, viewing it also through the filter of the participatory frame. Moreover, in shifting among acting in the make-believe frame and spectating in the reality frame, individuals always view the other frame through the participatory frame. In distancing from both reality and not reality and seeing the two through the same mediating filter, individuals are able to find similarities and differences of structures, roles, and norms, allowing them to gain a clearer understanding of both fantasy and everyday performance. To summarise, fantasy performance allows us to see two performances at once, with both being filtered through a well-defined and constrained mediating frame. As a result, we gain a clear understanding of the performed fantasy as well as the reality we base it on.

Interestingly, it is the slight failures and leaks throughout the structure of the performance that aid it in working so well. As an individual's fantasy experience becomes too emotional and leaks into the self, a stronger connection is created resulting in a greater learning experience. Montola, Stenros, and Waern (2009) also note "bleed" between role-playing games and real life in their study, regarding it as being due to individuals lacking knowledge of their own limitations. In contrast, I would argue that this failure of structure helps individuals understand their own limitations and the wider structures that these limitations are a part of. The emotional leak can be destructive, as I have noted, but it can also be extremely productive. It thus requires delicate balancing, as I will show in more detail in the next chapter.

Through fantasy performance, individuals seem to gain an almost utopian and modernist sense of truth, taking form in understanding clear patterns of performance. Modernity promised a single, idealised future, while postmodernity finds value in trying out various experiences and filling them with personal meaning (Firat 1991, 2001). Interestingly, experiences of fantasy involve both simultaneously: a wish to gain a clear understanding of performance and a wish to gain varied experiences. Fantasy performance allows individuals to gain fantasy truths, which are not filled with personal meaning, but have an ultimate, shared meaning. However, the truth makes sense only for that ephemeral, limited fantasy performance. The result is not personal utopia (or youtopia), but rather a contextual truth that aids the process of reality investment I have described.

8.4.5 The Self in Fantasy

Through fantasy performance, individuals become aware of various structures governing their lives. The individual is central to fantasy performance, as it is he or she that becomes subjectively aware of the multiple performances and negotiates engagement in them. However, how does the self tie into this? To answer this question, I first turn to how previous research has approached identity and its role in fantasy.

Contemporary society no longer provides us with strict identities, but rather leaves it to us to create them through various elements of our environment (Turner 1969; Cohen and Taylor 1976; Slater 1997; Holt 2002). Gergen (1991) proposed that contemporary culture has resulted in the self-multiplication of individuals, as they can be significantly present in more than one place at a time. Books, newspapers, films, and other media overcome the so-called restrictions of face-to-face communities, as the self is no longer limited to what is immediately before one's eyes (Gergen 1991). Consumer research has supported and developed this idea, presenting the self as multiple and fragmented in postmodern consumer culture (e.g., Firat 1991; Firat and Venkatesh 1995; Firat and Dholakia 2006). Bahl and Milne (2010), for instance, argue that consumers have multiple self-positions, which are continuously in dialogue with one another. In the context of fantasy experiences, Fine (1983) similarly talks of a real self, a game self, and a fantasy self. Theatre, performance, and sociology studies also often refer to dualities or some-

times even trinities when theorising the performance of the non-real (e.g., Meyerhold 1968; Stanislavski 1989; Schechner 2006). This usually involves multiple selves, or one's self being extended to the character that is portrayed.

Markus and Nurius (1986) discuss the concept of possible selves, that is, hypothetical self-schemas that are based on the past and aim at the future. Individuals, they continue, have repertoires of possible selves, which include selves that are ideal, ones that could become real, and ones we fear. Markus and Nurius (1986) point out that possible selves are important because they act as incentives for future action, and provide an evaluative and interpretive context for the current understanding of the self. Schouten (1991) develops the idea of possible selves in the context of consumer research. He proposes that individuals are motivated to actualise and incorporate a possible self into a revised self-concept when it is well elaborated, desirable, and perceived as attainable. Actualisation may involve consumption, as this allows the accumulation of instrumental goods and services that become symbols of the new selves. Schouten also proposes the idea of fantasy selves, pointing out that these are clearly distinguished from potential reality. People often do not perceive fantasy selves as possible, but they can set *the direction* for the possible if it is elaborated on. Rook and Levy (1983) also propose the idea of fantasy selves, stressing that they are ideal and have an on-going relationship with our real selves. Green, Brock, and Kaufman (2004) similarly incorporate the idea of possible selves in their research, proposing that transportation into fantasy contexts presents individuals with the possibilities for their selves to develop.

It is clear, then, that the following ideas prevail in consumer research: individuals have multiple selves and, when engaging in fantasy, gain a fantasy self. However, I would argue that no such multiplicity of self takes place in fantasy performance. Firstly, the fantasy character that is performed is not perceived as a self at all, but as something other. Secondly, while many different roles are available to individuals in fantasy performance, they focus only on one at a time, with others remaining conscious possibilities. This clarity of role is a central aspect of the experience, as it helps resolve any confusion and miscommunication. Working against multiplicity of self, Armitt (1996) describes fantasy to involve scrutinising the boundary between self and the not self. Zipes (1983) writes that fantasy simply requires the individual to take a step back from their self. In a similar fashion, Schechner (2006) has proposed the idea of being not self and not not self in the context of performance studies. In contrast with the idea of multiplicity, there is then an idea of a vague, unclear self. I would argue against this as well, as my findings show individuals clearly differentiating two roles, one being themselves and the second being a fantasy character, that is, an other.

In his work, Walton (1990) mentions that make-believe does not involve taking on an identity between the self and a fictional entity, but rather involves both separately. My findings coincide with and extend this idea. As I proposed earlier, fantasy performance is very conscious and controlled, involving multiple frames and a role in each of these frames. The fantasy character never becomes a possible or potential self, as it is not perceived to be a self at all. At the same time, individuals distance themselves from their everyday self, as they consciously no longer

perform it nor perceive it to be natural. Chekhov (1995) would say that the ideal self takes over in this situation. He argued that the ideal self controls the self and the character self, building the latter from a third person perspective through using the self and various external elements. However, individuals do not perceive a self to be taking control, only experiencing the negotiation of two structures. The performance would thus seem to be self-less, that is, without a self. The idea of always having a self is imposed on us, but do we really always experience it?

Following Butler (1990, 1993, 2004), the self emerges as it is performed. Fantasy performance does not seem to involve the performance of a self, but rather the simultaneous, controlled performance of the fantasy character and the self. Neither is naturalised and both are perceived at a distance. The fantasy character is a performance guided by very clearly specified limits, rules, and norms of the make-believe frame, thus giving the performer insight into the various constructed elements at play in the creation and sustenance of identity. Similar to the investment into reality I describe in the previous section, both self and character are performed with a reflexive distance, using the filter of the participant role that first structures the fantasy character and thus gives structure to the everyday self. The elements and structures of the fantasy character are contrasted with the performance of the everyday self, and the constructed nature of the latter becomes revealed. This results in not only understanding one's self better, but also in understanding other people better, creating opportunities to learn how to interact better as well as communicate better with others.

All in all, individuals do not perform multiple selves, but consciously perform two roles. Neither of the roles becomes naturalised during performance, resulting in no experience of self during the fantasy performance. Moreover, the fantasy performance results in the comparison of the two roles, showing individuals what performances make up *a* self, and allowing them to construct and re-construct performances of *their* self and the character.

Through its connection to identity issues, fantasy has been presented by contemporary society as a very personal phenomenon (Jameson 2005). Moreover, consumer research tends to focus on studying fantasy as part of the inner worlds of individuals (Grayson and Martinec 2004; Martin 2004; Rose and Wood 2005; Fernandez and Lastovicka 2011). However, fantasy can never be truly private, as it is constrained by the social context in which it is created (Jackson 1981; Fine 1983). It would thus be unwise to limit fantasy to an individual phenomenon. Cohen and Taylor (1976) point out that "Living in contemporary society involves us in reality work *and* identity work" (p. 40, emphasis in the original). They imply that the two are interrelated in a complex manner. Following my findings and discussion, I would suggest that reality work involves understanding and negotiating one's performances of frames, while identity work is the understanding and negotiating of one's performances of roles in those frames. The two are, of course, interrelated and not always discernable. The performance of fantasy can take on quite different forms; resulting in different ways an individual negotiates these performances. I explore these ideas in the next chapter.

9 TYPES OF FANTASY PERFORMANCES

Through participating in LARPs, it became evident to me that games do not only vary thematically, but they also differ a great deal in the type of experience and value that an individual gains from them. In the context of experiencing art, Walton (1990) notes that the same piece of art can have multiple fictional worlds built around it by the individuals personally experiencing it. He continues that while the fictional worlds focus on the same object, they do not necessarily overlap. Something similar can be seen in LARP: individuals attending the same game may have completely different experiences with a focus on different values and meanings. As I have discussed in the previous chapters, the different experiences and the value gained from a LARP performance depend on many of the LARP's structural and interaction elements, such as the organisation, themes, and participants' cooperation. *"[The experience] depends a lot on what type of world it's situated in and what kind of style the game has,"* Peg points out. However, the type of experience seems to also be strongly connected to the LARPer's own attitude and aims.

Based on my data gathered in the context of LARP, I propose a typology of two fantasy performances, which I call entertainment-driven and exploration-driven fantasy performances. It is important to note that the two do not work as a dichotomy and are not opposites, but can overlap in many ways. The experiences involve both structural differences and different attitudes of the performers. I discuss these elements in detail throughout this chapter.

The first type of fantasy performance is more focused on entertainment and getting away from everyday life, with themes using media scripts and narratives directly. Entertainment-driven performances of fantasy involve more passively interacting participants who seek playful and leisurely experiences that are oriented toward personal pleasure and individual fantasy. As I elaborate in detail further, this orientation focuses on personal rather than shared goals, even as the experience has a clear, explicitly communicated structure. The performance is spatially and materially focused, revolving around the social space of fantasy. While the social spaces of the fantasy and reality are clearly separated, the performances of self and character may become more easily blurred. The result is a personal and emotionally strong experience, which allows momentary departure from everyday life and gives access to personal ideals and desires. This often results in nostalgia, but does not cause individuals to reflect on or question the performance as readily.

Exploration-driven LARP performances are more active and reflective. These are thematically more serious and often involve elements of realism, recombining elements of popular culture rather than using them directly. The performance is aimed at staying true to character and creating shared fantasy. At the same time, exploration-driven performance involves a more vague structure and a lax attitude towards material aspects of the performance. Fantasy and reality contexts are seen as different, but are less of a focal point of performance with their structure being more emergent and co-created. Instead, physical embodiment and focus on the character become central. There is little frame change and performance when spectating, which leads to individuals focusing on distinct differentiation of the self and character individually. The performance results in deeper reflection of both fantasy and reality.

Before delving into a deeper analysis and comparison of the performances, it is important to note that the two types of fantasy performance that I propose are connected to individuals' development in the LARP context. As my interviewees have described, many LARPers tend initially to be more passive participants who seek leisurely experiences that are oriented toward personal pleasure rather than reflection. They start out within the context of LARP with individualist aims to have fun, be entertained, and possibly interact with a favourite medium.

With time and experience, individuals take on more challenges within LARP, undertaking characters that are difficult, have more authority and responsibility. Moreover, they focus more on the needs and aims of the shared performance, rather than just their personal enjoyment. Players become more reflective and aware of LARP processes: how characters, interactions, and storylines work and how they can be developed or manipulated. Individuals learn how various structures and relationships work, allowing them to adjust to various situations better. LARPers' analytical skills become much better, and they become more active players that take initiative. With the development, keeping the difference between self and character becomes easier and more important, PLD and leak of emotion becoming less severe. Learning and reflection turn into conscious processes that individuals value.

I witnessed such a development in most of my interviewees, most clearly in Rose, whom I interviewed multiple times over the duration of two years. At first, Rose stated she was quite a passive player and that she wished she was *"more active"*. Later on she says: "*I've definitely developed. For example, just now in a recent game that was at the end of August, my character was the wife of* the *bad guy ... or she wasn't really his wife, but anyway … that was really fun because she was in on a lot of stuff. […] She wasn't the head honcho, but near it."* Rose became more active in the games themselves and in taking on more challenging themes and characters. She further points out *"learning a lot"* through getting to *"experiment with stuff."*

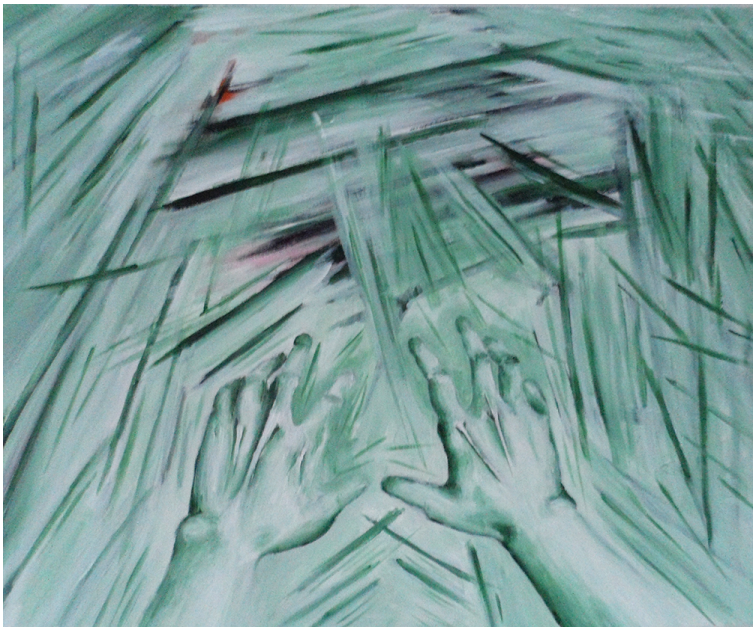
While LARPers seem to always become more aware and reflexive over the various elements of fantasy performance with experience, they do not always move towards the exploration-driven types of performances. Many players show a clear development from one type to the other, while some tend to switch between types. Experienced LARPers tend to become involved in more reflexive experiences, but many still like to engage in the more entertaining experiences at least

once in a while. Wade, who stresses that he prefers more thought-provoking games, points out that *"Sometimes you feel like... you need to be in a LARP where everything is just easy and fun."* Some LARPers seem to consciously choose to stick to a type of game because of a preferred value that is gained. For example, in a discussion after a historical LARP I participated in, one of the LARPers pointed out that she used to really enjoy having reflexive experiences in LARPs, to ponder and discuss these. However, nowadays she likes to only attend LARPs that she knows will be more entertainment-driven, as she just wants the experience to provide a break from her routine filled, mundane life. In contrast, another LARPer told me that she exclusively attends very politically oriented games, as she is politically active in her normal life and wishes to explore and develop this aspect through fantasy experiences.

Different types of LARPs thus provide different value to participants. However, it is important to note that the same LARP can provide different types of experiences to different players. The type of performance is thus intrinsically tied to the LARPer's own performance and attitude. I explore the two types of performances in this chapter through their detailed comparison.

Mapping out the types of experiences involved a long process of thorough analysis and reanalysis (for an initial version of the typology, see Seregina 2014). I strongly supported the textual analysis with art-based methods, represented in Pictures 16-19, with 16 and 18 representing entertainment-driven fantasy performance, and 17 and 19 representing exploration-driven fantasy performance. Pictures 16 and 17 were a part of an initial, discarded theorisation, while 18 and 19 provide a point of view on the finalised ideas presented in this chapter. (Note that numbering in the names of the paintings is chronological)

Picture 16 "Fantasy Pt. 1: Illusion of Escape," acrylics on canvas, 46x55cm



Picture 17 "Fantasy Pt. 2: Activist Disillusion," acrylics on canvas, 46x55cm

Picture 18 "Fantasy Pt. 5: Escapist Extension into Context," acrylics on canvas, 46x55cm

Picture 19 "Fantasy Pt. 4: Activist Self Investments," acrylics on canvas, 46x55cm

9.1 Comparing Fantasy Performances

In this section, I take a closer look at entertainment-driven and exploration-driven fantasy performance through a parallel comparison of some of the central elements of the performances, and linking them to previous research and theory. Namely, I compare the two through their setting, performance of self and character, performance of interaction, performance of social space, and the aftermath of the performance.

9.1.1 Setting the Performance

LARP performances are set in a pre-defined theme and based on a limited set of materials, which, as I noted in Chapter 8 tend to involve elements of media. While themes of the performances are not directly tied to their type, I found some clear thematic tendencies. Moreover, entertainment-driven and exploration-driven LARP seem to use media elements in slightly different ways to build up a basis for the performance.

9.1.1.1 Entertainment-driven Performance

Entertainment-driven LARP performances tend to be focused on leisure and amusement, often with the aim to escape one's everyday life. *"It's escapism of sorts,"* says Dawn. May explains: *"my life involves a lot of stress, so it's like, you can leave this world's worries and problems behind."* Chase says that sometimes he really needs to get away from everything and LARP can provide such an experience: *"It's sort of like you get to change your persona and get out of the mundane … away from your normal world. Into like a different world."* Such performances mostly involve positive emotions and leisurely, cheerful experiences. The themes tend to be light and less serious, rarely delving into and sometimes even avoiding themes that are political or ideological.

However, this does not mean that the performances are always joyful and fancy-free. The performance does not need to be "fun" in the common-sense understanding of the word. It can also be scary or shocking, but still in a pleasurable way; the same way a horror movie may be fun to watch. For example, May described her experience at an over-night zombie LARP as *"fun."* The goal is to be entertained, and the setting leans toward the otherworldly and unrealistic. *"I don't want it to be like reality,"* Dot explains.

In entertainment-driven performances of LARP, individuals often perform their own desires and wishes, which is easy to approach and fun to engage in. Rose explains that she likes to *"add things that you would like to do yourself."* Similarly, Dot points out that *"it's fun to get to do my own thing"* and perform *"characters that have characteristics that I wanna have."* This desire attainment is very much in line with the psychological and psychoanalytical view on fantasy as wish-fulfilment and desire (Zizek 1989, 1997) or day-dreams (Campbell 1987). Moreover, the performance is similar to Kant's (1952) concept of beautiful. The fantasy performance, just like the beautiful aesthetic, provides direct and positive pleasure, which takes a form that is well structured and clearly understandable.

Fantasy performance in entertainment-driven LARP seems to be in many ways similar to the dominant form of fantasy in contemporary media, that is, fantasy as pure entertainment (following Hume 1984; Suvin 1988; Armitt 1996; Mackay 2001; Jameson 2005). The entertainment-driven LARP performance also connects to Todorov's (1970) *marvelous*, which he described as idealised otherworldly fantasy, and Hume's (1984) *illusion*, which is a comfortable, idealised other world into which one can step. Hume (1984) points out that such fantasy is easier: it does not educate or even fully engage individuals, but fulfils desires and comforts, resulting in immediate gratification. It is important to note that the experience of entertainment-driven fantasy is always felt to be very real and consistent. Moreover, individuals are not completely taken in by the fantasy, as an element of contrast and comparison always remains. Entertainment-driven LARP thus leans toward *vision* (Hume 1984) and *fantastic-marvelous* (Todorov 1970).

Individuals engaging in entertainment-driven performances prefer the use of archetypes and clichés, possibly because these create a very sturdy and concrete base for a performance. Individuals can directly repeat performances that are already familiar to them through media. Moreover, the basis of the entertainment-driven LARP performance is often directly borrowed from a single popular culture franchise or fandom, such as *Lord of the Rings* or *Harry Potter*. These can involve specific fictional worlds or characters, historical events, or other more or less objectively verifiable worlds. The worlds and their structures are usually very *"familiar"* to the performers, and do not need to be *"explained in detail"* (Dot). For instance, I have attended a few Harry Potter themed LARPs. In these LARPs, the characters, plotlines, and the fantasy world were directly borrowed from the book and movie franchise. These were not explained in detail to participants, but their knowledge was assumed. This was not a problem in any way because all performers had extensive knowledge of the material. Such direct use of popular culture allows very explicit synthesis of one's performance internally, as well as explicit synchronisation of performance with others.

Similarly to Stanislavski's (1953, 1989) *perezhivanie,* entertainment-driven fantasy performance does not stray from the original text and frame much, with imagination merely filling in any imperfections. It is, however, important to note that entertainment-driven performance *can* also happen in LARPs created entirely by players or through a more fragmented use of media. I am merely noting that this type of experience is *more common* in the LARPs created out of direct use of media. I believe this may be linked to the fact that most media used as basis for games has often already been experienced as leisurely by individuals. Consequently, the atmosphere of entertainment may be transferred to the LARPs.

9.1.1.2 Exploration-driven Performance

In contrast to the leisurely and amusing entertainment-driven LARP performances, exploration-driven LARPs are more serious, challenging, intense, and even negative in some ways. The themes tend to be more difficult and critical, focusing on events such as living in an occupied country or the life of patients in a mental institution. Dawn gives an example of a very intense historical LARP set in Fin-

land in the early 1900s: *"it can be very difficult theme-wise. Like the conflicts between the Red Guard and the White Guard."* May also points out that *"it can get pretty heavy."* She continues: *"I played this mentally ill character […] and it was such a strong experience that I sort of felt sick afterwards because you are really inside the character's head and try to act according. It's almost a negative experience. […] At the same time, it's really interesting."*

Exploration-driven LARPS are ideological, political, psychological, and intertwined with real life problems, often demanding LARPers to take strong moral and ethical stances through their characters. In discussing a historical LARP, Dawn describes the themes being *"very political, like more serious themes […] it's interesting to ponder those elements."* These are not fun or entertaining, and individuals do not find any type of perverse pleasure in them. People engaging in exploration-driven fantasy performances are rather more concerned with an experience that allows them reflection and a new perspective. The following field note exemplifies this idea well:

> *In a conversation before a LARP, one of the participants was telling me about the more "serious LARPs" that she had attended. A recent one focusing on experiences of an occupied country had left strong impressions on her. She said: "It was…I can't say it was fun, but it was interesting. It was an experience. I learned a lot." (Field note)*

The themes of these performances tend to be informative as well as encourage learning and reflection. For instance, a game may shed light on certain events in history, political regimes, or lives of certain subsections of society, such as mental patients, racial or gender minorities. Exploration-driven fantasy experiences can thus be alienating, but, through this, provide individuals with much food for thought. In this, exploration-driven fantasy performances lean toward Hume's (1984) *disillusion* fantasy, which aims to challenge and disturb individuals in order to bring forth the limitations of reality. Exploration-driven performances are also similar to Todorov's (1970) *uncanny*, which aims to shock, in the way *disillusion* does, but by using less appealing elements. However, exploration-driven LARP does not seem to be as extreme as *disillusion* and *uncanny*. The performance is bodily, engaging, and challenging, but it is not hostile, disengaging, defamiliarising, or shocking. It does not erode or disturb people's understanding of reality, but encourages confrontation and change. The performance distances its participants from their selves and their everyday lives, providing them with new perspectives and allowing them to see previously invisible limitations and structures of their own lives. Exploration-driven LARP performance thus seems to lean slightly toward *revision* fantasy (Hume 1984) and the *fantastic-uncanny* (Todorov 1970), which are both less aggressive, but still allow the questioning of one's structures.

Exploration-driven LARP experiences do tend to involve much more elements of realism through a strong connection to everyday themes and problems, as well as the use of more "down-to-earth" media as its basis. However, such LARPs are never direct copies of reality, but always involve some recombination of dramatic, fantastic elements that makes it different from real life, as Wade describes:

Wade: Some games are really close to normal everyday stuff or like they aim for that kitchen sink realism, but they always still involve something dramatic or like dramatic elements, which could be a part of normal life, but it's a more dramatic component that is always there. But it's still different.

Despite the close link to realist and everyday themes, exploration-driven fantasy performances are still mostly based on elements of popular culture, thus supporting the idea of Mackay's (2001) *imaginary entertainment environments*. These elements are usually not used as directly in exploration-driven fantasy, as they would be in entertainment-driven performances, but are rather mixed and matched or thoroughly extended, creating seemingly new and unique fantasy worlds and characters. The performance becomes more of a recombination of familiar elements of performances rather than a direct copy of media performance. Hence, the performance is not as explicitly synthesised or synchronised among performers, as entertainment-driven fantasy, but requires explicit personal negotiation.

My interviewees have described having more exploration-driven performances in following games: a cowboy LARP based in various cowboy-themed literature, films, and TV-shows; a LARP roughly based on the TV-show *Deadwood*, with the context and themes developed to be almost unrecognizable; LARPs based in various historical literature and accounts. May explains: *"You can see the inspiration comes from books, fics* [=fan fiction]*, sometimes even poetry. Also maybe myths and games, your own life."* The shared knowledge base of popular culture is still tapped into by the performance, and may be used to describe or explain elements of the LARP. For example, I witnessed a discussion before a game involving vampires, in which LARPers decided on what powers the creatures will have by referencing various media, such as *Underworld, Twilight,* and *True Blood.* Just like with entertainment-driven LARP, it is important to note that exploration-driven performances *can* happen in LARPs based in direct use of media, but are *more common* in the piecemeal versions of the fantasy performance.

Exploration-driven performances clearly step away from Stanislavski's (1989) ideas of theatre and performance, which strictly follow the text they are based on. The focus rather revolves around the exploration of possibilities outside a given structure. This is similar to Chekhov's (1995; Pitches 2006) idea of performance going beyond the text and making an imaginative leap to the world of fantasy. In addition to similarities with Chekhov's views on theatre, exploration-driven LARP performance bears many similarities to the *predstavlenie* type of theatre performance, which I will discuss later.

9.1.2 Performance of Self and Character

The self is a central element of social and aesthetic performance. As Brecht (1965) stresses, to understand anything in our lives and in our world, we need to focus on the individual. The way, in which individuals perform their selves and their characters as well as negotiate the two, differs somewhat in entertainment-driven and exploration-driven LARP performances. I discuss these differences next.

9.1.2.1 Entertainment-driven Performance

Because entertainment-driven performances are focused on leisure and having fun, they tend to be much more self-focused. Sue says: *"I must admit that I play a lot for myself, because I like planning what happens to the character and stuff like that…because it is your own character that is the centre of the game for everyone."* This does not mean other people are completely ignored or forgotten. However, in these performances, LARPers do focus more on their own positive experiences and emotions, engaging in their own desires, dreams, and wishes. On the one hand, this may emerge as individuals placing their own ideas into ready-made characters, as Wade admits to doing:

> *Wade: Sometimes I'll take a break and get away from the active game and start thinking if there's some shortcut that would allow my character to do something like this. I usually come up with some excuse. You always think of something. […] for example, in my last game I wanted to talk to one specific character, but he was constantly doing something else. And my character would not have gone and talked to him anyway. So there was no opportunity. So then I just sort of went up to him, grabbed him, and we went outside to the yard. I sort of forced it, but it was a really interesting conversation.*

On the other hand, individuals may partially or entirely write their own characters, sometimes consciously putting in their personal wishes and goals. Rose gives an example of this:

> *Interviewer: You said you wrote this character yourself?*
>
> *Rose: Yeah. It was really interesting. Like you could add things to it…like I added abilities to predict the future. So it lets you do fun stuff like that. I thought that through that I can kind of explore things like…or like be involved with so-called secret sciences that have always intrigued me. But then living in a Christian environment, I've sort of felt that you can't go meddle with that. And now I can sort of explore it as a mundane thing. That way…I can leave it in the game and peacefully explore myself with these things. So it's like a safe environment.*

Stanislavski (1953) believed that to create performances that are alive and make sense, we need to use elements, experiences, and memories from our real lives. In *perezhivanie*, the inner world and self of the actor is the starting point of the performance, creating the fantasy performance first in the mind and then spreading it into the character and surrounding social space. Spectators gain an emotional experience by becoming infected by the witnessed performance that is alive and emotional. Both are swept away by the new reality (Stanislavski 1953).

In entertainment-driven LARP, the self is not the starting point of the performance, yet in taking on personal emotions and wishes, the self clearly becomes an important part of the performance. At the same time, some similarity to *predstavlenie* can also be found in the experience, as a certain level of differentiation of self and character from a third person perspective takes place. Nevertheless, this dual awareness in fantasy performances of LARP, which I discussed in Chapter 8, seems to become easily mixed through the personal meanings and

emotions of entertainment-driven performance. It is more *"difficult to differentiate"* (Peg) self and character when the two are close in terms of emotions and characteristics. *"They can get easily mixed up,"* says Chase. Hope also describes such an experience: *"She [the character] is so similar to me, that there was just no difference at some points."*

In *perezhivanie*, the actor becomes emotionally involved through extending his or her self, while the spectator is infected by the created emotion. In LARP, the actor and spectator are not separate people, but the roles are performed by the same individual. Hence, emotion and empathy may become too difficult to differentiate in entertainment-driven performance that is emotional and takes on a personal focus. This is aided by frequent frame switching, which I discuss in the next section.

9.1.2.2 Exploration-driven Performance

In exploration-driven LARP performances, a clearly perceived difference of self and character seems to be an important element: *"When you look at your self in the game, you don't see yourself but the character"* (Hope). As Sue points out, *"It's good that the character is different from what you're like."* Peg describes having similar experiences and continues that *"it's easier to keep them apart"* when the difference is clearly discernable.

Exploration-driven performance tends to involve characters that are not written by participants, but are rather put together by GMs. This results in LARPers acquiring characters that are rarely similar to their everyday selves or ideals. Writing a character yourself lets you do whatever you want, but, according to my interviewees, getting a ready-made character creates a more novel and eye-opening perspective. Moreover, as I already mentioned, exploration-driven performances are usually much less positive or cheerful as ones in the entertainment-driven performances. It seems that *because* the experiences are mostly negative, individuals instinctively distance and differentiate themselves from the fantasy characters in a more conscious and structured manner. As May stresses, *"you want to keep [negative character attributes] away from yourself."*

Performing a character clearly differentiated from the self is much more *"challenging"* (May) and requires *"more work"* (Wade) in terms of preparation and concentration. More focus is put into staying true to the character through bodily performance and interaction: *"you should only do what the character would do"* (May). The hard work is rewarded, as such performances are *"genuinely surprising"* (Wade) and *"push you"* (Sue) to do something different and normally unthinkable. Taking a completely different perspective is also more *"freeing"* (Dawn) in terms of opening new points of view and questioning personal structures. Exploration-driven performances thus support individuals in stepping over their own limitations, issues, and fears. As I will show later, the greater distance that is created allows deeper reflection on the self, norms, and structures of reality, resulting in more vivid learning experiences as a result of exploration-driven fantasy experiences.

A central critique of *predstavlenie* is the disconnection between performers and what they portray, which, according to Stanislavski (1953) rips apart the body and

the soul. Similar to *predstavlenie,* performers of exploration-driven fantasy do indeed create stark distance between their everyday self and their character. However, this does not mean that they are disconnected or that the performance becomes impersonal. Individuals embody the character, aim to portray them realistically, and experience everything that happens to them. Performers can even be completely taken in by the created reality. At the same time, they are continuously conscious of the fact that what they are performing is not a part of their everyday life and everyday self, avoiding personal elements as part of the performance and pushing away from their own self. Exploration-driven LARP thus combines the focus on character's inner emotional life of *perezhivanie* with the rational distance to the character and focus on imitation of movement of *predstavlenie.* There is still a strong focus on the individual (as Stanislavski 1953, Brecht 1965, Chekhov 1995 have theorised), but the focus shifts away from the self and personal wishes to the embodiment of the character in a way that fits the shared performance best. Moreover, the exploration-driven performance often becomes personal only after the LARP is over, through reflection and contrast to one's everyday life. Therefore, the role of the spectator does not fully come into being until the performance of fantasy is over, making the whole performance more sequenced in terms of frame switching. I will elaborate on these ideas throughout the chapter.

9.1.3 Performance of Interaction

As I described in Chapter 8, interaction in fantasy performance involves both acting and spectating. These are negotiated and emphasised differently in the two performances. Moreover, my findings show that interaction in entertainment-driven fantasy tends to be more reactive, while interaction in exploration-driven fantasy tends to be more active.

9.1.3.1 Entertainment-driven Performance

I met Rose, one of my interviewees, at her first LARP. When talking about her first games, she stressed the fact that she really did not want to be very active in LARPs, but rather enjoyed having many elements to react to. Rose explains that *"…it's much easier that way. […] I think it really helps if you have things to react to, like concretely react to. Otherwise you have to be active yourself and sort of search for it and that doesn't amount to anything."* Similarly, Chase says he would rather *"tag along in things,"* than create any action. Dawn, in describing her first LARPs, says she specifically asked for more passive characters, as she did not want to play an active role in the fantasy worlds. She describes being a *"bystander or quiet observer"* through her characters. In these situations, individuals are waiting to react to elements of the social space created by other performers. This does not mean, however, that they are physically or emotionally passive, or that the performance is unresponsive as Todorov (1970) and Jackson (1981) have implied in the context of *marvelous* fantasy. However, individuals do not like to take initiative or create fantasy elements themselves.

In addition to a more passive type of interaction, stepping out of the make-believe into reality is common and allowed within entertainment-driven performance, letting individuals slip back into the self/spectator role at any time. LARPers go OFF-game more frequently to converse even about the most minor issues of the LARP. However, because any element can be discussed OFF-game for clarification, mannerisms and physical body movements are not stressed as much within the performance of fantasy itself. Metaplay is performed more externally among players, rather than internally by the individuals themselves. Chase explains how going OFF-game a lot clarifies the structure of the game: *"You have to OFF a lot, for example if you wanna do a spell right. So if you trip someone [IN-game with a spell], then the other guy needs to react in the right way."* Consequently, individuals continuously switch between the make-believe and reality frames. Fine (1986) called this continuous switching oscillation, although he proposed that individuals continuously switch among the three frames (fantasy, game, and reality frames). As I proposed in Chapter 8, individuals are rather continuously aware of two performances, switching between acting and spectating. Awareness of fantasy performance always remains through the participatory frame, never allowing the performance to become delusional or its duality to become blurred. However, as the two types of interaction are continuously switched, elements of acting and elements of spectating more easily leak into one another. The result is explicitly synchronised, dual performance, the elements of which may start to overlap. This is aided by the roles of self and character becoming easily mixed within entertainment-driven LARP performance.

The light themes of the LARPs support the continuous frame switching, as comic elements break the fantasy performance. Entertainment-driven LARP often relies on the mockery and excessive use of clichés as part of its light and entertaining nature. Clichés have been shown to break structure (Fiske 1989) and question norms (Butler 2004), but within entertainment-driven performances they seem to remain on an entertaining or even comedic level. I exemplify this in my field notes:

> *The game involved a lot of comedy, a lot of intentional puns and making fun of characters/plotlines. In fact, players intentionally made fun of various archetypes and clichés that were used as basis for the game by making links to everyday life, media, as well as (and especially) to things that have happened in other the games we have all attended but which doesn't necessary have relevance to the game at hand. People thus seemed to intentionally try to push each others' limits to drop out of character as they burst out laughing. The game altogether was not that serious, as the themes were very light in any case. (Field note)*

The focus of the performance is on the fantasy world rather than the fantasy characters. Moreover, other fantasy characters seem to be perceived more as part of the social space to *react to*, and not individuals to *interact with*. This is exemplified in Hope discussing her PLD after a Harry Potter LARP:

Hope: I feel like [the PLD] is more connected to the world than the characters. […] it's really sad that the world disappeared from around me. […] When everyone becomes their specific character, you get the exact environment that you want to be in, you're there.

The performance becomes more spectator-driven, as individual wishes and one's self become central. This leads to fantasy that is more individual than shared. This does not mean that the basis, meanings, and experience of the performance are not understood by others, but rather refers to the goals and outcomes of the performance being more personalised, self-focused, and kept to oneself.

In *perezhivanie,* the actors and spectators are never united, as their difference is upheld physically through spatial arrangements and psychologically through actors ignoring the everyday world and the spectators in it (Stanislavski 1953; McAuley 2000). The actors extend their selves, and the spectators remain outside the fantasy performance. Similarly, interaction in entertainment-driven LARP performance only occurs between actors or between spectators, that is, only as the characters in the make-believe frame or as their selves in the reality frame. Following Badiou's (1990) understanding of spectating, the focus on the spectator's perspective in the entertainment-driven fantasy performance creates an objective experience, but only in the sense that it allows a bird's eye view of the performance, a holistic understanding of what is going on through continuously available knowledge of any part of the performance in the form of switching of frames and performance types. As I will discuss in detail later on, the frame switching along with the similarity of self and character seems to cause more intense nostalgia as a result of the fantasy performance.

9.1.3.2 Exploration-driven Performance

All LARP performance depends on the support of others, but in exploration-driven performance it becomes even more central, overshadowing any individual endeavours. The performance is driven by a desire to create a whole that works well through co-creating it with others. Personal desires or ideals are thus rarely incorporated into the performance, as there is no place for them.

An important part of exploration-driven performance is creating a good game for other participants. Instead of just reacting to fantasy, individuals take on a central role in producing it, which requires a more interaction-oriented and shared performance. Individuals take more initiative, and focus on creating elements to react to both for themselves and others. As Wade describes it below, everyone's role becomes that of a side character that supports the performance.

Wade: …I guess it's nice that the [LARP] has a cool story, but I feel like often the stories are not are not special in any way and you get more out of the stories only afterwards than when you're playing it because you only see a fraction of it. Because like in all movies, literature, games, often in these entertainments things there is a main character who is guided, through whom you follow the story. And then in LARPs I feel like it's more that everyone plays a side character or that there is no main character…which means…or I mean the point is that it's not storytelling for one guy.

Shared fantasy thus becomes prioritised over individual fantasy. This is further exemplified in the structuring of the social space of the fantasy performance, which I describe in the next section.

It becomes evident that exploration-driven LARP experiences tend to involve more active, rather than reactive, involvement from the performers. Hope stresses that it is a matter of taking things into your own hands: *"You can do a lot more with the character than what you're given […] it's a type of application, improvisation."* May points out that being active creates a much more interesting game: *"I often like having someone to throw things around with. Otherwise you might just get stuck […] So it's good that people are like 'here I am and I'm gonna do this thing like this'."* LARPers consciously create content for and interaction in the performance that challenges themselves and others. Dawn explains: *"I mean you can discuss these things in your own life and argue for your own opinion and your own point of view. But then in the game you can take on opposite things and try to defend the other opinion. It creates interesting conflict."*

The exploration-driven LARP performance tends to involve less frame switching, with performance mostly taking place only within the fantasy frame. Breaks in the game are not welcomed, unless for emergencies. Individuals are expected to adhere to their characters realistically throughout the duration of the performance, and almost never go OFF-game to discuss issues of the game. Dawn explains: *"It's ok and it's fun if people make stupid jokes during the game…but it's better if you stick to the game world. Because that creates the atmosphere."* May also points out that if you *"go off game a lot, the game experience becomes really fragmented."* The lack of switching creates a more internally consistent fantasy performance, but also results in much less shared clarity *during* its performance. Synchronisation is not directly discussed, but takes place individually. As I will discuss later on, individuals tend to attain a full picture of the fantasy performance *after* it is over in the debrief and discussions after the LARP performance.

Metaplay tends to take place individually and internally through "internal play." Internal play is an emic term for LARPing as an individual's thought process as opposed to LARPing as interaction among individuals. For example, contemplating how a character would react to a situation would be constituted as internal play, whereas discussing it with other LARPers would not. Peg explains that internal play requires *"understanding the character and their logic […] thinking through their worldview."* May adds that this can be extremely interesting and beneficial, as *"you find a lot of new levels in the character when you have more internal play."* Because there is little OFF-game discussions among spectators, exploration-driven performance offers and requires much more internal play, through which LARPers work things out on their own and less through contact with others. Internal play could be described as spectating and thus switching to the reality frame on one's own. Therefore, frame switching *does* take place in exploration-driven fantasy performance, but it is not very common and only emerges internally.

While exploration-driven performances involve differentiation of fantasy and reality internally rather than externally, individuals are much less reflexive of the performance in relation to their own lives *during* the actual performance. I believe this is connected to the more passive spectator role in the performance. The lack of reflection during the performance is further necessitated by the fact that explo-

ration-driven LARP performance requires full concentration, creating a very Stanislavskian *perezhivanie* type of experience of living *through* the fantasy. Brecht (1965) also stressed a need to experience rather than mimic, but he described a need for a montage type of performance. In exploration-driven LARP, however, the performance is seen as a whole, even though its basis may be very fragmented.

Following Badiou (1990), exploration-driven performance is much more subjective, as it is confined only to the individual perspective of acting within the make-believe frame during the fantasy performance. Individuals rarely spectate and interact as spectators during the fantasy performance, switching to the reality frame only in dire need. It is thus a more actor-driven performance with a single, limited point of view. The self and the character are kept strictly apart and do not communicate directly in exploration-driven fantasy experiences, just as an actor would in *predstavlenie* performances (following Brecht 1965; Meyerhold 1968). *Predstavlenie* would also have spectators and actors interact, breaking the so-called fourth wall. However, as the exploration-driven LARP performance is actor-driven, and the spectator and the self are, in fact, the same role, emphasis is put on differentiation. Moreover, while largely dormant during the performance, the spectator becomes active in decoding and recoding after the performance is over. I will discuss this in more detail below.

9.1.4 Performance of Social Space

Within entertainment-driven and exploration-driven LARP performances, individuals negotiate social and material space in different ways. The former tends to involve a very strict given structure, while the latter encourages co-creating in a performance lacking clarity and "truth."

9.1.4.1 Entertainment-driven Performance

As I described above, entertainment-driven performance often involves the direct use of familiar narratives and themes from media. This familiarity brings with it a strict structure and attention to detail. Rose explains through describing a Lord of the Rings –themed LARP: *"When you are so familiar with the world… you easily become critical about what people are supposed to look like and how they're supposed to be."* As individuals engage with themes taken directly from popular culture, they are much more demanding of the structures being used, often disapproving when things are not (sometimes literally) by the book. Rose continues: *"I like it when there's a clear environment and everyone reacts to it in that same way."*

The structures of the social space of entertainment-driven fantasy are based in the almost objective materials of the popular culture media, which creates both a material and an immaterial base for performance. As in *perezhivanie* (Stanislavski 1953), actors and spectators are given a perfectly ordered, otherworldly structure to fully believe in. Moreover, the focus of the performance is a "finished" world. Dot exemplifies this idea in discussing a LARP based on her favourite fandom, Harry Potter.

> *Dot: I'm always really critical about what is suitable for the world that is in the LARP and when we play a Potter game then I'm like we have to go by the books, so like if there are things that aren't in the books or if it's different in the books or if somebody comes up with something really weird...and really important for the LARP, but what was in the books wasn't like that at all... then I get like 'noooo!' That completely turns me off […] we need to stick strictly to that world because there's already a lot of material around it so you don't need to start developing anything around it. It just really pisses me off! Let Rowling be enough!*

Through entertainment-driven fantasy, personal ideals are momentarily realised, and fantasy is made real through its performance. As Stanislavski (1953) suggested, the movement of the performance is from fantasy to reality.

Individuals tend to become very attached to the fantasy social space of the LARP in entertainment-driven performances, most likely because of the strong personal connection. For example, in debriefs and discussions after the Harry Potter themed LARP I mentioned earlier, many LARPers express really missing the world and not wanting to go back to their own lives. Hope describes the feelings she experienced after the LARP has ended: *"It's just frustrating when the world disappears around you. At the end of the last game I was just like 'Damn, this ended'. I can't be in this world anymore, I have my own worries and my own thoughts…"*

In adhering to the structure of the fantasy world strictly, considerable focus is placed on the material and spatial elements: *"The space needs to be just right"* (Hope). This includes material props, but also various special effects, such as lights, music, and sounds. The propping of spaces and characters is usually very detailed, aiming to be as *"realistic"* (Peg) as possible for its context. The material fantasy elements are clearly set apart from objects and spaces that are seen as part of everyday life. *"It has to be like a different world,"* says Rose. The two social spaces, reality and fantasy, thus seem to be strongly associated with and kept apart through spatial and material elements. As Dot points out, *"it's important that the props are different from your own, normal things […] it upsets me otherwise."* Rose similarly stresses: *"I mean I will never use these [props] in everyday life! They're not "me"…but they're important."* Just like Kant's (1952) beautiful is found in the form of things, entertainment-driven LARP performance is found in its material context. Such fantasy performance does not create movement, but rest. Badiou (1990) described this as an element of "bad" theatre, and Stanislavski (1953) as part of remeslo, the theatre lacking meaning and emotion. At the same time, Stanislavski stressed detail is the material and social context of *perezhivanie*, as this supports creating a believable other world that is alive. The detailed propping on entertainment-driven LARP similarly helps build the fantasy world, making it more *"realistic"* (Peg) and *"believable"* (May) in the eyes of performers.

Interestingly, the intense focus on making the performance more real through props and the space is actually what makes it feel less like reality for its performers. The performance forms its own perfect entity that is divorced from reality through a distinct, physical, almost objective difference. However, it is important to note that, while not a part of reality, the performance is still experienced as extremely *real*.

Entertainment-driven fantasy is focused on the construction of a fantasy world and place. Following Zukin's (1991) ideas on place, entertainment-driven fantasy creates a comfortable experience with a strong experience of place. Zukin proposes that such a place taunts the image of reality, as it creates a landscape of power, not through centrality or monumentality of space (which is the way places generally accumulate power), but through reconciling tensions of public/private consumption, global/local capital, market and place. She continues that the created power is more subtle, as it restores and re-invents collective memory, and both represents and moulds desires. Zukin warns that a self produced in such a context tends to ignore problems and is more susceptible to the space's influence, as the power of the space is not directly perceived. By focusing on the social space, performers of entertainment-driven LARP seemingly gain control over the performance by being aware of and having the ability to influence its clear structures. At the same time, individuals are trapped by their own desires and whims, which are very much structured by the media elements the performance is based on. Entertainment-driven fantasy supports the mix of reality and fantasy in performance of the self, even as spatial and material structures of the two performances are kept clearly apart.

The clear separation of social spaces reflects Todorov's (1970) *marvelous*, which requires individuals' belief without question, and Hume's (1984) *illusion* fantasy, which is unquestioned, perceived as consistent, logical, and separate from everyday life. However, entertainment-driven fantasy performance is not as meaningless and empty as *illusion* (Hume 1984) and *marvellous* (Todorov 1970) are described to be. The performance seems to lean slightly toward *vision* (Hume 1984) and *fantastic-marvelous* (Todorov 1970), which allow a comparison of fantasy and reality, but does not challenge individuals or influence action in their everyday lives.

In relation to theatre performance, the entertainment-driven performance continues to be very similar to theatre of *perezhivanie* (Stanislavski 1953, 1989, 1990, 1991). Both performances take place in a different world that is detached from individuals' everyday "real" world. These are guided by strict structures given by a director, or, in the case of LARP, based in materials borrowed from entertainment media. A structure is first created, and individuals are then placed in it to do as they wish. Moreover, both stress the authenticity of the created world, focusing on an abundance of detailed physical and spatial elements.

Brecht (1965, 2000) argues that such a self-evident fantasy world gives access to desires and ideals, but does not account for the process of attaining them. Consequently, the performance is either limited to the individual's experiences or eradicates the self completely by mixing the self and the character. Entertainment-driven fantasy once again echoes these elements. Firstly, the entertainment-driven performance is indeed very self-evident and clear, but this can also be a strength. Individuals stress enjoying such a thoroughly defined social space, as, unlike in real life, it allows full understanding of the performance. Secondly, the experience is not limited to what the individual has experienced, but understanding of performance is rather objective and holistic, as I showed earlier. Thirdly, the fear of mixing self and character is clearly present in LARPers' narratives. Normally, an

immense effort is made to separate the experiences, but leaks also happen, resulting in intense nostalgia, as I will later describe in more detail. In line with Brecht's thoughts, entertainment-driven fantasy seems to be a more fertile context for emotional leakage.

9.1.4.2 Exploration-driven Performance

Exploration-driven LARP performances are not directly based on existing narratives, as I explained earlier. Some rules and guidelines are always given as basis of the LARP, but they are concise and more open to interpretation. As a result, LARPers are not thoroughly familiar with the world that they are entering, and the structure takes a flexible form: *"you can just improvise…you can just sort of think what is natural for that particular world and situation"* (Wade). The structure emerges more vividly as it is performed, with individuals building on each others' performances to create a working structure, a shared fantasy. May exemplifies this idea: *"It's not really a problem. It's easy really. [The fantasy world] might be different, but it is what it is and that's where we are and we just have to go with how things are. Once it gets going, it's easy to follow."* Control of the performance is given to the individuals' performance and not to the structure, just like in *predstavlenie*. Performers become co-creators of the fantasy world.

The less strict attitude towards the structure of the fantasy world can also be seen in the role of material and spatial elements. Propping is still strongly present both for spaces and individuals, but there is much less focus on its presence and detail than in entertainment-driven performances. *"It depends on the game…sometimes you really don't need the space to look like where you are [in the LARP],"* says Sue. Sue continues that more details are left to imagination: *"I have enough imagination that I don't need … like a war wagon can just be a couch […] It doesn't need to be more than that couch."* Although rare, some games go as far using no props at all. For instance, I attended a LARP where the only propping of the space involved rearranging the furniture of a community centre to better fit the context of a reality show LARP. Wade gives a similar example: *"I've been to games where we've been in like a classroom which is supposed to be a spaceship and there's only been tape on the floor…so it doesn't really always matter."*

Materiality should not be mixed with bodily elements. The body and its elements, such as movements and mannerisms, remain important. Dot says: *"I tend to approach things physically, like, is [the character] superior or inferior. And their voice and how they talk."* These bodily elements become tools for communication, as there are less material aspects to work with and almost no OFF-game discussions for clarification of game details. As in *predstavlenie* (following Brecht 1965; Meyerhold 1968), physical and bodily movements of exploration-driven performance become central, while material elements and their authenticity are of less importance. As a result, the fantasy and everyday worlds become harder to distinguish, supporting the need to keep the everyday self and the character clearly apart from one another.

The exploration-driven fantasy performance further reflects *predstavlenie* (Brecht 1965, 2000; Meyerhold 1968) in that it does not provide a holistic picture

during its performance: it leaves out details, and demands that individuals figure things out and provide meanings for themselves through internal play. In contradiction to Brecht, Meyerhold, and Artaud, the lack of a holistic point of view and resultant meaning construction do not result in fragmentation or montage. A clearly different other world of fantasy and a lived experience are still experienced by individuals engaging in the LARP performance. Moreover, the performance actually becomes more consistent because there is less frame change than in entertainment-driven LARP. The exploration-driven performance involves fully existing and almost "living through" the experience as the character and a focus on staying true to the character, which would be closer to Stanislavski's (1953) *perezhivanie*. Lewis (2007) has suggested that even in a performance oriented towards doing rather than a frame or a plot, a plot can emerge as a side-product and become significant. Perhaps the montage is only visible from a more objective point of view in the role of the spectator, which is not active in this type of fantasy performance.

9.1.5 After the Performance

As I have shown, entertainment-driven and exploration-driven LARP differ in the ways they are performed. What is more, they differ significantly in how individuals negotiate the performance once it is over.

9.1.5.1 Entertainment-driven Performance

Entertainment-driven LARP performance tends to involve light and positive themes, resulting in mostly positive emotions and experiences. The performance allows individuals step out of their everyday lives and momentarily interact with personal wishes and ideals, but not bring these back to their real lives. The value of such an experience is thus in the interaction with a different world, being entertained within it, and momentarily experiencing one's own desires. Such value is temporary and experienced only *during* the LARP performance, which takes place in a starkly different social and material space.

The differentiation of fantasy and reality in this type of performance takes place more clearly in setting apart the two social spaces, with an especial focus on material elements. Stanislavski (1953, 1989) proposed that the belief in fantasy stays within a very limited context, that is, behind the fourth wall. This means that the actor has belief in the context, the self, and the interaction they are in, and the spectator has belief in the context and interaction they perceive, but are not a part of. A significant distance is kept in place between actors in the fantasy context and the spectators in the reality context, which, according to Abercombie and Longhurst (1998), results in the fantasy being raised to the level of a mystical separate order. Similarly, in entertainment-driven LARP performance, fantasy and reality are differentiated and believed in contextually, even as they take place in the same space.

As the spaces of everyday life and fantasy are kept strictly apart, they do not connect or overlap. Brecht (1965) proposed that such a lack of connection between realities results in a loss of contact between the spectator and actor, leaving both unchanged and not wanting change. Within entertainment-driven LARP performance, there is no loss of contact between the roles, as both are performed by the same individual. In fact, the opposite seems to happen: the character and the self may come to overlap, with emotions and experiences becoming mixed. Focus in spatial and material differentiation seems to support the possible mixing of the roles of self and character, as material and spatial elements are changed for the duration of the fantasy performance, but not with each frame change, which, as I noted, is a common occurrence. With the support of personal themes, this causes the basis of the differentiation between the self and character to become unclear.

Individuals seem to become easily attached to the entertainment-driven fantasy performance: the performed character is personal and easily mixed with the self, the performance often involves personal wishes and desires, and the fantasy performance is very appealing. Consequently, a leak of emotion seems to occur much more easily. For instance, after the LARP, participants may still experience emotions, and hold on to perspectives and opinions from the fantasy world and fantasy characters. This is noticeable, for instance, in LARPers talking about characters in first person, referring to experiences in LARP as their own and to the characters as themselves.

> *I had an interesting conversation with one of my co-LARPers after the LARP had ended. She played a character that was an accomplice of sorts for my character. My character ended up deceiving hers and stabbing her in the back. The conversation was interesting because often LARPers try to talk about the character in third-person, but she kept talking about how I had scared her and let her down (i.e. in first person). I wasn't sure if she was taking it personally. (Field note)*

As a result of the positive and personal experiences, individuals seem to have a more difficult time distancing themselves from the fantasy performances.

Entertainment-driven performances are much more likely to result in intense post-LARP depression (PLD) for LARPers. In answering a question about whether she experiences PLD, Sue says: *"Always. I always get PLD. Especially when the character's life is somehow better that my own…or like they are people who you would rather be…so you miss it… It's horrible."* Consequently, the intensity of PLD seems to be directly tied into the leak of emotions and experiences proceeding from the performance of the fantasy to the performance of reality.

This could be described as misaligned resynthesis of resynchronisation with everyday performance. The explicit temporality of fantasy performance makes the past, present, and future of both the reality and make-believe frames (Wyllie 2005; Fuchs 2010). As the two performances oscillate and bear a similarity, resynthesising everyday performance may become difficult. Moreover, the synthesis of fantasy performance is accomplished through a strict structure of performance and is aided by other people, while resynthesis of one's own everyday life has to be an individual endeavour lacking an explicit support system.

The mixing of roles and leakage of emotion resulting in intense PLD could be described as taking the form of nostalgia over a context, which cannot be returned to or recreated in everyday life. As I discussed in my literature review, nostalgia was originally a spatial phenomenon of longing for places physically far away, which developed into a temporal phenomenon that yearns for the past and values it over the present (Jameson 1991; Higson 2014). In the context of contemporary Western culture, nostalgia is no longer spatial or temporal, but rather induces a longing for ideals that may have never even existed (Eco 1973; Armitt 1996; Higson 2014). While the entertainment-driven LARP performance would seem to represent contemporary atemporal nostalgia, it actually taps into temporal nostalgia. Entertainment-driven fantasy allows individuals to perform a different reality in a bodily and material manner, but the performance is not associated with nostalgia until it is gone. Consequently, the *performance* of fantasy is not yet nostalgic, as nostalgia only steps in *later* as a wistful longing for a time and space no longer reachable or even truly existing as part of everyday life. Rojek (1995) describes nostalgia as pandering to people's longing for stability and security. Similarly, entertainment-driven fantasy performance answers these needs through providing very clear guidelines and structures during performance.

Brecht (1965) stressed that a focus in the material causes aesthetic performance to become hallucinatory and fake, a harmful illusion to its spectators and actors. In entertainment-driven LARP, the spaces of fantasy and reality are kept clearly and consciously apart, which means the performance does not become delusional. However, the entertainment-driven performance does become the type of aesthetic performance that Badiou (1990) calls a machine for capturing desired identifications, latent meanings, and pleasure. Brecht (1965) claimed that by meeting individuals' needs, the surrogate poisons the body, because by feeding illusive desires, discontent only grows. In entertainment-driven fantasy performance, individuals try to escape the struggles of everyday life through entertainment, and the entertainment maintains the struggle, as it does not edify or resolve problems. Consequently, the structures of everyday life are confirmed and supported. As Campbell (1987) proposed, the created desire is never reached in fantasy, but is rather continuously regenerated.

Entertainment-driven fantasy would seem to result in something akin to the description of Utopia, which is perfect and ideal, presenting that which individuals feel to be missing in their lives (Jackson 1981; Dolan 2005). Moreover, as Sartre (1940) proposed, the ideals of fantasy that are worded by us are incomplete, resulting in continuously unfulfilled desires. Similarly, Jackson (1981) writes that Utopia seemingly makes up for the things that we lack, but, in truth, only neutralises us, as it cannot feed back into everyday life.

Kozinets (2002a) has suggested that while Utopia is no longer possible in the form of grand social visions, it does emerge as small-scale, individual, and personally enriching "youtopias" through various entertainments and spectacles. These do not provide any resolutions to problems, but offer a space separate from everyday life in which to play (Kozinets 2002a). Previous consumer culture research has shown similar findings, proposing that fantasy provides relaxation and escape from problems and worries in a separate world of refuge and freedom (e.g.,

Belk and Costa 1998; Kozinets et al. 2004; Kinkade and Katovich 2008). In contrast, Mackay (2001) argues that individuals can never escape from reality through fantasy, as the structures are too similar. He believes the result is not delusional, as Brecht would have it, but rather a short-term pain alleviation through immersion into similar structures of power. I believe this is what takes place in entertainment-driven fantasy performance. Individuals are neither delusional, nor do they truly escape reality, as the fantasy performance is based on and continuously contrasted to it. However, this does not mean that individuals do not *aim* to escape, thus making the performance escap*ist*. The result is a very limited creativity that fulfils desires, but does not create anything new to challenge individuals to transgress social order or even themselves (following Jackson 1981; Hume 1984; Leach 2004).

Picture 20 "Of Bittersweet Utopia and Nostalgia," acrylics on canvas, 64x81cm

Utopia is never reached through entertainment-driven fantasy performance. Hence, once the performance is over, nostalgia for the never-attained ideal sets in, taking form in PLD, as I describe earlier. This supports the idea of Utopia and nostalgia being very close processes, as I theorised in Chapter 2. Utopia precedes and reaches forward toward the performance of an ideal, while nostalgia succeeds and reaches backwards towards the performance of the ideal (see Picture 20).

Because we fail to reach Utopia, nostalgia sets in and no process of reflection is attempted. Interestingly, this finding is in opposition to Jafari and Taheri's (2014) proposition that nostalgia gives us the opportunity to reflect. I will further elaborate on this idea.

While lacking educational and reflective aspects, the entertainment-driven fantasy performance is not pointless and meaningless. It does serve its own purpose and has its own function. Holtorf (2010) writes that fantasy focusing on entertainment does not cause individuals to rethink or reflect, but can still provide a pleasurable and meaningful experience through the created emotions. As in *perezhivanie*, individuals become emotionally involved as actors and infect themselves with emotion as spectators, creating experience that is alive. In contrast to what previous literature has suggested, I propose that individuals are neither liberated from reality (e.g., Saler 2012) nor escape reality (e.g., Fiske 1989) through such performance of fantasy, but rather become enabled to perform an idealised and less realistic, yet more clearly defined version of reality. The well-defined performance narrows down the choices and possibilities individuals are normally faced with, creating a momentary break from the chaos. This is comforting, but is not transferrable to everyday life, thus reassuring the governing structures.

9.1.5.2 Performance of Spectacle

Entertainment-driven fantasy performance is aimed at entertainment, personal desires, and getting away from everyday life. This bears many similarities to Bakhtin's (1984) concept of carnival, which I already described and differentiated from LARP performance in Chapter 8. It becomes relevant to note the development of the concept. Bakhtin (1984) and Fiske (1989) point out that many contemporary performances appear to be carnivalesque, but are, in fact, merely spectacles. Fiske even suggests that the carnival may not be fully possible in the context of contemporary popular culture, because it is missing direct interaction as well as bodily and communal elements, which are central to the carnival.

The spectacles referred to by Bakhtin (1984) and Fiske (1989) are often based on mass media and do not link back to everyday life, but can provide leisurely escape from the latter (Fiske 1989). McLuhan (1964) wrote that books and films allow readers or viewers to step into an illusion; they transfer the individuals from their own world to another. Yet this is done so completely that it is accepted subliminally and without critical awareness. McLuhan (1964) continues that such experiences create an imagined sense of identification and unification, but do not form communities of people. It is a passive experience that emerges in the individualisation of our culture and mass-customisation of consumer goods (Jackson 1981). Consumer culture studies have described such spectacles. Examples include Rose and Wood's (2005) study of reality TV-shows, Kozinets' research in the contexts of Star Trek fandom (Kozinets 2001) and the Burning Man festival (Kozinets 2002a), as well as the exploration of the ESPN zone by Kozinets et al. (2004).

According to Agnew (1986), Bakhtin (1984), Schechner (1985), and Hetherington (1998), the most important sight of the spectacle within contemporary

Western culture is the marketplace, the most typical forms being theme parks, fairs, or retail spaces. Such spaces are strategically designed to support and enhance consumer fantasy, often restoring and reflecting popular culture (Peñaloza 1998; Sherry et al. 2001; Kozinets 2002a; Kozinets et al. 2004; Diamond et al. 2009). These fantasy worlds play around with elements of the real, giving temporary and localised emancipation from consumer culture (Belk 2000; Kozinets 2002a). Through the themed spaces, the fantasy does not disturb the real and focuses on entertainment (Jackson 1981). Sherry et al. (2001) have even proposed that fantasy becomes synonymous with spectacle in the contemporary cultural context.

Certain similarities to the idea of a spectacle can be seen in the performance of entertainment-driven LARP performance. As I have shown, entertainment-driven performances are intrinsically linked to popular culture, just as spectacles often are, which helps create the strong sense of clarity experienced in fantasy performance. Entertainment-driven fantasy performances also allow individuals to momentarily perform a different world, which they take on in an unquestioned way and which is directed at one's personal ideals and desires. However, Debord (1994) writes that spectacles guide individuals through pre-fabricated desires, making them passive. Illouz (2007) adds that the spectacle desensitises people and detached them from one another. In contrast, while individuals interacting with entertainment-driven fantasy tend to be more reactive than active, they are in no way passive or unengaged. Kozinets et al. (2004) indirectly address this issue. Following Firat and Venkatesh (1995), they argue that the spectacle has evolved into a "hybrid form of spectacle" (668), with individuals becoming "both sovereign and manipulated, subject and object, passive and active, individualist and conformist, exploited and emancipated, and hero and fool" (p. 669) through the use of technology and their bodies. However, bodily movement does not equal being active. This reflects the false notion of individuals being passive if they do not visibly respond (Abercombie and 1998). I would nevertheless agree with Kozinets et al. (2004) that spectacles are not necessarily just passive and conforming.

I propose that in entertainment-driven performances of fantasy, individuals engage in an acknowledged performance of spectacle. Discussions of the idea of the spectacle normally focus on the audience's point of view, which is only half of the fantasy performance I have described. Previous research and theory tend to take for granted that a marketer or producer creates the performance, and consumers can only passively receive it or possibly interact with a ready performance. However, as I have shown, individuals can also perform the spectacle. The performance is bound by a strict structure and re-creates familiar bits of behaviour, which are mediated by popular culture imagery (following Debord 1994). It nevertheless involves engaged actors and spectators that acknowledge the spectacle and make it their own by connecting it to their personal ideals and wishes. Consequently, the individuals are not pacified and desensitised by pre-fabricated dreams, but become actively involved with a live performance of their own ideals. Hence, individuals gain a feeling of agency in their performance, but perceive it as contained by the fantasy.

9.1.5.3 Exploration-driven Performances

In exploration-driven LARP performance, performers are detached and distanced from their personal characteristics and desires, as well as the experiences and emotions of the character. *"You want to keep them apart,"* says Peg in a discussion about performing the character in relation to self. The performance allows individuals to *"do something you clearly would not do yourself"* (Hope) and then *"compare to what you would do"* (Rose). Charters (2006) wrote that the idea of pleasure is very tightly bound to aesthetic performance. However, he theorises that individuals may be able to separate pleasure from appraisal of the experience. By separating *from* pleasure, individuals seem to take on very critical and reflexive performances of exploration-driven fantasy. The value of this type of fantasy performance is weighted towards *after* it takes place, in the more in-depth reflections and consequent learning that people take part in retrospectively.

As I have shown earlier, there is quite little discussion, reflection, and contrast of reality and fantasy *during* the exploration-driven LARP performance, because frame switching in infrequent. After the performance, however, individuals are able to gain a holistic understanding of actions, interactions, and plotlines, as well as contrast their fantasy experiences to their everyday lives. This happens through debriefs and discussions with other performers. Hope explains: *"It's a great feeling to get to share with others what happened to you and hear what happened to them. And just really everything that happened."* Individuals want to *"get a hang of the entirety [of the LARP]"* (May) because *"you don't get to see the entire game during the game"* (Chase). Consequently, the change of make-believe and reality frames and the performance of corresponding actor and spectator roles are sequenced, not oscillating.

There is only a little emotional leak and consequent PLD in exploration-driven LARP performance, because individual wishes and desires are rarely a part of the performance, the self and character are kept clearly apart, frames of performance are changed sequentially, and the themes of the performances tend to be quite negative. Resynthesis of everyday life is thus much easier, as the two parallel performances are easily differentiated.

At the same time, this type of fantasy performance tends to result in more learning outcomes. During a discussion after a LARP, one of the participants pointed out to me that attending LARPs with more serious themes really *"opened her eyes to a lot of things."* She went on to explain how LARP *"pushed her to become a feminist,"* as the games caused her to *"realise how structures are often built around men"* (Field note). Similarly, LARPers have pointed out that they have learnt about and reflected on various political, cultural, social, and historical elements through attending LARPs that involved more negative and serious themes. It seems that exploration-driven fantasy allows deeper investment in reality, a process I described in the previous chapter. Next, I elaborate on how this deeper reflection and learning take place.

Brecht (1965), Meyerhold (1968), and Badiou (1990) argued that their perspective on theatre supports educational processes, allowing both actors and spectators to learn about their selves and the world. *Predstavlenie* enables these learning processes through montage, alienation, and the eradication of the fourth wall. I discuss these next from the point of view of my findings.

Meyerhold (1968) suggested that learning is prompted in both actors and spectators by the montage of performance, that is, through the lack of detail and given meaning, which encourages individuals to think. While exploration-driven performance is not fragmented, the same process does take place through co-creation of structure and meaning through performance, which I discussed in previous sections of this chapter. The performance, its meaning, and structure emerge only as they are performed among actors, not given or borrowed from other sources prior to the performance. This learning process is further supported by the sequenced frame change, as it allows successive performance of meaning. First, individuals form meaning as actors in the limited context of fantasy, without the shared articulated synchronisation of performance outside the make-believe frame. Then, after the performance is over, full meaning of the performance is gained in a much more articulated manner among spectators in the reality frame.

Brecht (1965, 2000) stressed that conscious questioning and reflection further requires alienation, or, the V-effect. For the spectator, alienation is about facing grotesque themes that are not clear, familiar, or self evident, and do not involve any magic or illusion. Todorov (1979) similarly discusses alienation to be a result of unexpected and shocking elements. Hume (1984) talks about the exaggeration and skewing of fantasy as well as disturbing emotions as the basis of alienation. The exploration-driven fantasy performance does tend to involve more serious and negative themes that result in intense experiences, thus providing an effect similar to, but not quite as extreme as the V-effect from the point of view of the spectator. Hence, I would suggest that the reflection and consequent learning is supported by the negative and serious themes, as these aid in keeping the fantasy performance at a secure distance and in sustaining the objective spectator role. As in *predstavlenie,* the exploration-driven performance moves from reality to fantasy in that it makes the more realistic performances seem strange and unreal. When something that we perceive to be unimaginable or unacceptable is performed, we gain knowledge of how the cultural system works.

For the actor, Brecht (1965, 2000) says that alienation requires conscious experiencing of a third person point of view, as well as a lack of empathy with and immersion into the character and their emotions. Rationality is the founding pillar of such performance. While performers of exploration-driven LARP certainly distance their self from their character, they also empathise with the latter, which results in extremely emotional experiences. Peg describes learning about her self and about life by *"feeling and experiencing what the character experiences,"* and then reflecting on what she *"would have done"* and how she would have reacted as her *"real self."* This type of performance is more similar to Hume's (1984) description of alienation in the context of *disillusion* fantasy. According to Hume, alienation does make a claim on emotions, while taking a more reflective and rational stance toward make-believe worlds. Similarly, McConachie (2008) stresses that emotion is a central part of any aesthetic experience and dismissing it breaks down the performance. Brecht (1965, 2000) feared that empathy would easily create passivity and cause individuals to be deluded by the illusion of fantasy. However, McConachie (2008) is firm about the idea of emotion and empathy being necessary elements of performance, as they support rationality, attention, motivation, and

co-creation. My findings support McConachie's (2008) point of view: within exploration-driven LARP, individuals do distance themselves, and take a more rational perspective to both their characters and their selves, which supports reflection and alienation. However, these are still experienced with emotion and empathy. Therefore, the key to gaining educational outcomes is in clearly differentiating the self and the character in their performance. As reality and fantasy remain differentiated, illusion does not set in.

Brecht (1965) and Meyerhold (1968) propose that learning also requires the performance to eradicate the fourth wall, as this allows communication *with* spectators rather than *to* them. In contrast to this idea, the exploration-driven LARP performance seems to almost make the fourth wall *clearer*, as frame switching is discouraged and the difference between self and character, that is, spectator and actor, is emphasised. In this sense, the performance is actually similar to *perezhivanie*, as actors and spectators experience emotions separately, on either side of the fourth wall. Individuals are continuously aware of both acting and spectating, but the performances do not cross-interact, and the spectators are never acknowledged by the actors. Tolkien (194), Boruah (1988), and Armitt (1996), among others, have stressed that the lack of differentiation of reality and fantasy would render the latter non-existent. Based on this idea, I would argue that the fourth wall is necessary for any type of fantasy to be performed, as, otherwise, it cannot be differentiated from reality performance and can even become delusional.

Stanislavski (1953) critiqued *predstavlenie*, proposing that it is effective in shocking and surprising the audience, but lacks long-term or significant influence because it does not create belief in or explanation of fantasy. Carnicke (1998) stresses that it is exactly by creating one's own truth (i.e. co-creating meaning through performance) that the performance is disconnected from quotidian life. In reflecting on this critique through my findings, I would, firstly, stress that belief in fantasy is clearly present within exploration-driven fantasy performance. Instead of social space and detailed material elements, this belief is placed in the authentic, truthful, and believable performance of the character. The performance is bodily and lived, yet clearly differentiated from the self.

Secondly, I would argue that, while exploration-driven performance does not necessarily have more connection to performers' everyday lives through the co-construction of meaning, it definitely has more influence on them. By making actors discover how and what to perform creates a much more life-like (and more "lived") experience. Then, in encouraging individuals to create shared meaning as spectators and hence allowing clear, sequenced comparison of fantasy and reality performances, individuals gain a better understanding of how one can perform and change performance in reality. I will elaborate on this idea in the next section.

Butler (2004) has suggested that we can only question or interrogate something through terms and concepts already known and intelligible to us. Similarly, Bammer (1991) believes that fantasy is nothing more than a reconstruction of structures we have been taught. As a result, we unknowingly or even unwillingly copy the structures that we live by in fantasy performances. In co-constructing

meaning, exploration-driven performance does not disconnect from or oppose life, but connects to it in new ways.

Exploration-driven fantasy performance can be linked to Kant's (1952; Lyotard 1994) sublime. Both are serious and even negative at times, resulting in experiences that push the boundaries of what is presentable and understandable. However, exploration-driven fantasy does not reach the same levels of obscurity as the sublime does. The former can be overwhelming, but does not result in completely limitless or failed representation.

Lastly, because themes of exploration-driven LARPs tend to be difficult, discomforting, and often quite negative, it would be tempting to describe the performance as dystopian in its nature (following Podoshen, Venkatesh, and Jin 2014). In consumer research, dystopia has been described as the opposite of the perfect and ideal Utopia (Hjerpe and Linnér 2009), a negative Utopia (Podoshen, Venkatesh, and Jin 2014), and a Utopia gone wrong (Gordin, Tilley, and Prakash 2010). I would propose that instead of dystopia, exploration-driven fantasy performance aims for Utopia, or, more precisely, a collective form of the Utopian process. Bossy (2014) explains that utopia can be analysed on three levels: individual utopia, collective utopia, and meta-utopia. Individual Utopia involves a personal state of mind, which may be linked to more collective forms of Utopia. It would seem that entertainment-driven fantasy performance aims at an individual Utopia. Collective Utopia is constructed through continued negotiation and interaction on a group level. Meta-Utopia is a more generalised collective construct that can take on the form of social movements (Bossy 2014). Kozinets (2002a) suggested that grand social visions of Utopia, that is, meta-Utopia, are impossible in contemporary culture. Yet collective Utopia may still be available to us, emerging in a fantasy performance that focuses on creating a shared experience. Moreover, I would suggest that through its lack of clarity and optimism, focus away from social space, and its process of showing possibilities, exploration-driven LARP performance reflects the idea of the Utopian (Bammer 1991), and not the more traditional Utopia. Therefore, entertainment-driven and exploration-driven fantasy performances emerge as different ways of approaching and reaching for Utopia.

All in all, I would propose that the reflection and learning in exploration-driven performance is based on a clear separation of the bodily performance of the self and the character. Individuals experience intense emotions, simultaneously clearly separating and distancing themselves from the performance: they both experience as characters and do not experience as characters. Through this strict and conscious distancing, emotions and experiences become easier to control, and any leakage does not become overwhelming. Consequently, exploration-driven fantasy does not create intense PLD and nostalgia, but allows deeper reflection, thus creating more feedback into individuals' everyday lives. To return to Jafari and Taheri's (2014) findings, it may be possible that nostalgia here takes the *form* of reflection. Nostalgia and reflection thus do not go hand in hand (as Jafari and Taheri suggest), but are rather different facets of the same process of negotiating performances.

9.1.5.4 Agency and Emancipation

Badiou (1990) wrote that contemporary culture is comfortable, sheltered, and suspended. Aesthetic performances thus rarely show "signs of courage" for possibilities. Beuys (2009) proposes that we have come to feel helpless at the mercy of our surrounding conditions, which has resulted in the boom of escapism, a reckless pursuit of pleasure, depersonalisation, and a lack of meaning. Jameson (2009) agrees and continues that we have become incapacitated to imagine anything that is not dogmatically affirmed by the reality principle. Similarly, Butler (1990, 1994, 2004) and Fiske (1989) have explored how individuals reproduce the dominant ideology by repeating the same performances. This blinds people into believing that there is only one possibility for reality. As I will show in this section, I believe that exploration-driven fantasy performance opens the possibility of overcoming such limitations.

Chekhov (1995) wrote that *"to move forward, we need to lose our peace, yet no one wants to do that"* (p. 114, my translation). To overcome incapacitation, it is important for individuals to become active (Beuys 2009), to exceed themselves, and to contradict the cultural context (Badiou 1990). However, Dolan (2005) explains that no performance can create change in itself; it can only provide motivation or an incentive. Similarly, Beckett (2001) writes that aesthetic performance always stops just short of action. How can agency then be created?

Badiou (1990) proposed that while the performance itself cannot draw conclusions, it can be formed in a way that shows social structure at a distance or from a new perspective. In a similar vein, Borden (2001) points out that spaces and norms do not change, but rather our attitudes toward and engagements with them are altered. Through conscious and distanced performance of non-naturalised behaviour, exploration-driven LARP performance allows individuals to become aware of and compare performances of fantasy and reality, opening the latter to be questioned and reflected on. Performing familiar elements in unfamiliar combinations and from unfamiliar points of view changes individuals' understanding and perception of reality. Individuals become better informed about the structures of reality and of their own malleable position within them, but are not effectively freed of these.

Agency is not a human capacity or a basic element of the social, but it is a relational outcome of social performance (Passoth, Peuker, and Schillmeier 2012). Butler (1990, 1994, 2004) wrote that agency does not exist outside of norms, as these make it intelligible. Agency thus emerges as awareness of performances as well as in repeating them differently or not repeating them at all. Exploration-driven fantasy performance allows individuals to see how performances are built, how they can be changed, and what the outcomes of that change are. It is this new, different perspective on performance that allows individuals agency.

The focus on differentiating fantasy and reality through the performance of character and self supports the emergence of agency as part of fantasy performance. Debord (2009) has pointed out that to gain agency and escape the pacifying spectacle, we should reproduce ourselves rather than the things that enslave us, that is, the social and cultural structures of reality. At the same time, Butler (1993) points out that fantasy that is less distinct from our everyday lives

renders reality more frail. Hence, a lack of focus on performance of the social space causes the fantasy world to become vague and mixed with elements of reality, which allows performers to begin perceiving their reality as changeable and mouldable. The differentiation of fantasy and reality nevertheless remains through a rational distance to self and character, allowing individuals to reflect on, learn about, and influence the contexts they live in. Following these ideas, it would seem that exploration-driven performance results in more active and pronounced reality and identity work (Cohen and Taylor 1976), processes, which I discussed in Chapter 8.

Cohen and Taylor (1976) suggest that the process of reality work gains individuals their freedom, or emancipation. Emancipation has been a central, yet underexplored, issue in consumer culture research. With the concept of emancipation, consumer researchers seem to often imply individuals retreating from the market or culture completely (following Murray and Ozanne 1991; Firat and Venkatesh 1995; Firat 2001), almost equating it with escape and escapism (e.g. Kozinets 2002a; Kozinets et al. 2004). Kozinets (2002a), in his study of Burning Man, explored the question of whether consumers can even *be* emancipated. He concludes that consumers cannot escape the market, but temporary, localised, and individualised liberation may be possible in "conjuring up an alternative social realm that convincingly appears distanced from, outside of, or subversive to dominant market logics" (p. 36). Thompson (1996) similarly suggested that consumers feel freer in confined situations. Consumer research has thus linked emancipation with playfulness, impermanence, individual reconstruction of elements of spectacle, and escape from the market's structures and logic (Firat and Dholakia 1998; Firat and Venkatesh 1995; Kozinets et al. 2004). Following these ideas, Firat (2001) writes that the market stands as a major obstacle to the emancipation and empowerment of consumers in the production of meaning, as any recreated meaning becomes commercialised. Holt (2002) suggests that we cannot escape the logic of the market at all, as we live within consumer culture. Resistance and emancipation are possible within these structures, but they always feed back into the marketplace.

Following Butler's (1990, 1993, 2004) definition of agency, I would suggest that we can never get away from the structures that we have been acculturated into, because they will always serve as the basis for or background to our future performances. From this point of view, it is pointless to even raise the question of whether or not individuals can be free of or escape the market, as we cannot constitute anything outside of what we know. Kozinets (2002a) suggested that emancipation is found in temporally and spatially bound experiences. However, as I have shown earlier when discussing entertainment-driven fantasy performance, only temporary escapist performance is possible in such a context. We can nevertheless become emancipated from blindness to the power of structures by understanding how they work and consequently also how they can be changed. In exploration-driven form, fantasy performance allows the feeling of agency beyond the context of fantasy by giving us the tools for the "hiatus of iterability" (following Butler 1993) that is also applicable in everyday life. Emancipation *is* possible,

but it involves becoming aware of and breaking the naturalised structures of performance.

9.2 Discussion

Comparing the two types of fantasy performance, entertainment-driven and exploration-driven, has allowed me to highlight their characteristics and differences. These tie into and emerge as varying forms of the central characteristics of fantasy that I described in Chapter 8, that is, the performance of clarity, use of clichés and archetypes, the shared quality of fantasy, and the non-naturalised essence of the fantasy performance. I summarise these in Table 2 and discuss them in detail below.

	Entertainment-driven fantasy performance	**Exploration-driven fantasy performance**
Themes of performance	Leisurely, amusing, entertaining, light	Serious, challenging, negative, intense
Basis of performance	Direct use of media narratives	Fragmented elements of media
Performance of roles of self and character	Not always clearly differentiated; The two may become mixed; Spectator-driven	Performance clearly differentiated and disengaged; Performance becomes personal in reflection; Focus on strict, bodily performance of character; Actor-driven
Aim of performance	Personal wishes and desires	Creating a working entity
Structure of fantasy world	Strict, given, detailed; Focus on realistic structure, materiality, space; Strongly structured and structuring	Co-created and emergent; Less focus on materiality and space; Not strongly structured or structuring: May become confused with reality structures
Frame switching	Common, oscillating	Rare, sequenced
Differentiation of fantasy and reality	More pronounced in performance of social structures	More pronounced in performance of roles
Negotiation of participatory frame	More pronounced through interaction	More pronounced individually
Clarity/Holistic view of Performance	Before, during, and after performance	After performance
Interaction	Mostly reactive	Mostly active
Results of performance	Narrowing possibilities, thus creating escapist notions; Temporal nostalgia; Reaching for individual utopia	Opening up possibilities, thus creating seeming emancipation from reality structures; Reflection; Reaching for communal utopia

Table 2 The thematic and structural differences between the two types of fantasy performance

The presented typology extends the work of Hume (1984), Jackson (1981), Todorov (1970), and Armitt (1996) through showing how fantasy can be experienced in different ways and what implications these different experiences have. The typology also reflects Pine and Gilmore's (1998) idea of experience economy. Pine and Gilmore (1998) suggest that experiences have two dimensions: customer participation (which can be passive or active), and relationship to environment (which can involve absorption or immersion). This results in four types of experiences: entertainment (passive and absorbing), education (active and absorbing), escapist (active and immersive), and esthetic (passive and immersive). The experiences I describe here are largely absorbing rather than immersive, and hence my work provides nuance and detail to the way consumers can be entertained and educated.

It is important to note that while fantasy can seem to be divided into entertainment and non-entertainment, leisure and learning, fun and seriousness, the fantasy performance itself cannot, in fact, be equated with any of these. For example, both Kozinets et al. (2004) and Diamond et al. (2009) mention that fantasy may be playful and entertaining or educational and therapeutic, with the two possibly becoming mixed. However, fantasy exists beyond all of these concepts, as it is a different type of performance and a different type of attitude towards reality altogether. It is obvious that elements of entertainment or learning can become intrinsically tied into the performance, but these are never the performance itself.

It is further important to stress that one type of fantasy performance is *not* more important or gratifying than the other, unlike many have suggested (e.g., Campbell 1987; Brecht 1965; Jameson 2005). The experiences are rather gratifying and emancipatory in a different ways. Moreover, in practice, performance of fantasy is rarely defined by either extreme, and works best when taking a form that balances the two, tweaked and adjusted to fit the context.

In literature studies, Hume (1984) wrote that perfect fantasy would provide novelty and intense engagement to keep us interested, meaningful ideas that help relate to self and the world, and new possibilities to help us transcend quotidian life. Suvin (1988) also concludes that individuals need to identify with the illusion and be incorporated into it, but also keep a critical distance. Similarly, in theatre studies, Vahtangov (1984) called for combining the two "sides" of Stanislavski's typology of theatre, as people need play, but also remember that they are playing. These ideas are clearly reflected in my findings: for the fantasy performance to be most fruitful and engaging, it should take on a balance of entertainment-driven and exploration-driven performance, with different individuals having different types of experiences in the same performance. Engaging in fantasy thus creates a unique performance each time. Nevertheless, comparing the types of fantasy performance allows us to see the important elements that they are based on and influenced by. This is what I turn to next.

9.2.1 Performance of Clarity

Both types of fantasy performances ultimately aim at creating clarity and a holistic understanding of the entire performance. However, this is reached in different ways. In entertainment-driven performances, clarity and a holistic perspective of the performance are present throughout its duration. These are created through a well-articulated, thorough, and often previously familiar structure of the performance that limits the number of choices and possibilities open to individuals during the performance, thus instantly creating a more secure and approachable environment. The clarity is provided by thorough background materials, and upheld through the continuous switching between reality and make-believe frames. This allows the negotiation and explanation of make-believe and participatory frames among performers throughout the performance through interaction in the reality frame. Consequently, the explicit synthesis of performance is done together with other performers. As I will show later, this oscillation of frames contributes greatly to the mixing of fantasy and reality roles as well as the resultant temporal nostalgia. Consumer research studies have often proposed that fantasy experiences result in a blur, blend, or confusion of fantasy and reality (Kozinets 2001; Peñaloza 2001). However, I propose that it is merely the emotions and experiences of self and character that get mixed here, not the entire performance.

Exploration-driven performance only allows clarity and holistic understanding after the fantasy is over, and is much less clear in its structure throughout the fantasy performance. The performance is limited to the individual's point of view through acting, and involves uncertainty and meaning creation. This is sustained by a lack of oscillation of frames, with performance usually taking place only in the make-believe frame. Hence, the explicit consistency and synthesis of performance is reached on one's own. Switching to reality nevertheless always remains as a possibility through the constant conscious presence of the participatory frame. I believe that the lack of frame switching and the need to discover performance structure on one's own force the individuals to perform with and strive for more clarity in the performance of the character in order to create a good experience for everyone. After this clarity-striving performance, the individuals re-clarify the performance together, gaining shared understanding through reflection and discussions. Consequently, performers actually co-create meaning twice, first individually and then together. The active building of the performance creates a deeper personal engagement, urging individuals to question and learn.

9.2.2 Use of Clichés and Archetypes

Clichés and archetypes form roles, worlds, narratives, and types of interaction that are familiar to and instantly understood by their performers. While archetypes, most commonly borrowed from popular culture, seem to always form the basis for the performance of fantasy, they are not always used in similar ways or with similar outcomes.

Entertainment-driven fantasy performance usually involves a very direct use of popular culture elements, sometimes borrowing entire narratives, characters, or

worlds. Possibly because of the direct association with leisurely activities, such performance of fantasy is experienced as amusing and entertaining. Because the basis is so familiar and already forms an entity in individuals' minds, a seemingly complete essence seeps through the structure of performance. Consequently, the fantasy performance barely steps out of the symbolic order of reality, as most of its elements are already established in individuals' real lives. This reflects Auslander's (2008) idea of live performance emulating recorded performance in our media-centric contemporary world. Entertainment-driven fantasy is extremely clear and almost completely known to us even before we begin performing it. In some sense, it becomes more of a repetition of media elements than ephemeral action. Individuals do not recombine elements of performance, but repeat whole sets of them directly.

Exploration-driven fantasy does not use popular culture as directly, rather mixing elements and making them less obvious. Clichés and archetypes are thus used more inconspicuously or, sometimes when they are obvious, in a parodying manner. Performance is less well-defined and more challenging. Having little association with norms of leisure and amusement, performances become more serious and sometimes even negative. While not directly emulating recorded performance, a link to mediatised performance can be seen, and thus the co-dependence of live and recorded performance described by Auslander (2008) becomes, once again, reflected in fantasy performance. However, the recombination and saturation of media elements mask the repetition, making the performance seem more live and realistic.

9.2.3 Sharing Fantasy

Fantasy is always already shared (following Zizek 1992; Mackay 2001; Hendricks 2006). As I have just described, fantasy performance always has a basis in some type of use of clichés and archetypes that makes the performance understandable and available to its performers. Furthermore, Saler (2012) stressed that other individuals are necessary for contemporary fantasy and especially for it to allow reflection. My findings support this idea, but also show that this shared quality can emerge in different ways, with entertainment-driven fantasy supporting explicitly discussed synchronisation, and exploration-driven fantasy encouraging a synchronisation that emerges during the performance through explicit, individual negotiation.

In entertainment-driven fantasy, the shared quality of performance is made very clear and understandable, with each individual's similar understanding of the performance being the aim throughout the performance. This is both the result and cause of the frequent, oscillating frame switching, as individuals want to make sure of every little detail of the performance externally. Frame switching is clearly discussed, and negotiation of all the frames occurs mostly through conversation. Acting in the make-believe frame is passive, as all decisions are made outside of it and the guiding structure of fantasy performance is made extremely clear. The performance thus becomes spectator-driven. As the shared meaning is extremely

articulated and only applicable for the duration of the fantasy performance, it may become experienced as artificial. The fantasy truth is removed from reality.

The shared characteristic of exploration-driven fantasy is not clearly articulated, but emerges in the active creation of the performance together. This type of fantasy involves a lot less interaction among individuals outside the make-believe frame during the performance of fantasy, meaning that the performance requires much more individual negotiation. Frame switching is rare and sequenced. Individuals become more active in the performance, as they recognise that this is the only way to understand it and become focused on creating a good experience for everyone. The performance is therefore actor-driven, with the structure of the world being much less rigid. However, this does not make the fantasy less shared. The presence of other individuals remains a central aspect of the performance, as they cause the individuals to modify their performance across frames, and change the understanding of their structures. Moreover, I believe the shared meaning gained through exploration-driven fantasy becomes applicable outside of the fantasy performance. Meaning is not given and thus shared understanding is reached in an emergent way, much like in reality, yet in a tightly controlled environment. Furthermore, shared meaning is confirmed or edited afterwards, once the fantasy performance is over, which allows comparison of what elements of the shared understanding an individual got "right" and which they did not. Fantasy truth is not directly given and is thus not experienced as artificial, tying it into our understanding of reality. It is the meaning, which is reached individually, yet through shared performance that becomes more authentic.

9.2.4 Non-Naturalised Behaviour: Differentiating Fantasy and Reality

Fantasy performance always involves behaviour that is not naturalised, resulting in the dual perception of performance. Differentiation of reality and fantasy is emphasised differently in the two types of performances, with entertainment-driven focusing on social space and exploration-driven on roles.

In entertainment-driven fantasy, the difference of fantasy and reality is more pronounced in the social space of the performance. The two spaces, reality and make-believe, seem to be strongly associated with spatial and material elements, the latter of which applies to physical attributes of both places and people. While individuals clearly experience stepping into a different social space, the roles of self and character become less differentiated. This is caused by the placement of personal wishes into the performance, the continuous oscillation of frames with external negotiation of the participatory frame, and the focus on space and materiality. As individuals jump back and forth between reality and make-believe frames, the spatial and material elements do not keep up, hindering differentiation of fantasy and reality in the performance of roles. By focusing on the fantasy world and place, individuals perceivably gain power and control over them, only to be trapped by the same structures, as the space captures the desires it represents in its context (following Zukin 1991).

In exploration-driven fantasy, fantasy and reality are more clearly differentiated through the performed roles, that is, the self and the character. Because the aim of the performance is to co-create a working entity, the character needs to fit perfectly, becoming edited through the performance, yet clearly articulated and differentiated. The differentiation is further promoted by a lack of frame change and the internal negotiation of the participatory frame during fantasy performance. Fantasy performance becomes more bodily and the distinction between roles more conscious. The focus on bodily role differentiation along with a more vague shared structure of performance results in less focus on the material and spatial elements of performance in order to differentiate fantasy from reality. Hence, some structural elements may leak from one performance to another. By focusing less on social space and more on the performance in it, I propose that individuals are able to become aware of the structures that simultaneously empower and shape their actions. Through letting go of structuring social space, they are not released from its power, but become aware of how it works.

It is important to note that while exploration-driven fantasy may seem to be identity-focused, it is, in fact, beyond this altogether. As I demonstrated at the end of Chapter 8, performance of fantasy becomes self-less and thus the negotiation of identity issues only emerges as its side effect. Consequently, following Weber (2004), it would seem that entertainment-driven performance enacts place, while exploration-driven enacts activity. In other words, the synchronisation of fantasy performance in the make-believe frame is either focused on the material surroundings or on other people.

9.2.5 Outcomes of Performances

Fantasy performances have very different outcomes and answer different kinds of needs. Entertainment-driven fantasy allows momentary interaction with one's ideals, that is, one's individual utopia, in a well-defined and -structured setting. Desire is realised and relief from anxiety-provoking reality is achieved, but only during the performance of fantasy, with the value being temporally and spatially locked in the make-believe frame of performance. The performance is escapist, as individuals try to escape through it, but are, at the same time, constantly aware of its unreal nature and thus trapped by its structures. The performance results in temporal nostalgia for the individual utopia that was almost reached and then left behind, un-transferrable to everyday life as it is so clearly differentiated from it. These intense feelings of longing are supported by the mix of self and character roles: the character role is felt to be real, with some of its elements even possibly blended with the self, but the role becomes incongruent with reality, as it has no context to be placed in outside fantasy as everyday life is resynchronised. The performance is extremely individual and personal, with performers becoming main characters of their own performance, but the experience is cut off from reality. The result is agency that is perceived to only be possible within the confines of fantasy performance.

Exploration-driven fantasy allows co-creation of an emergent, different performance, in which individuals piece meanings on their own from their point of view. Moreover, after the performance ends, they re-piece the meanings once again through a more general, shared point of view. Individual desires are not placed into the performance, but the aim rather becomes to create a performance that works well for everyone; a collective utopia, in which individuals take on the roles of side characters of a shared performance. While this structure only exists within fantasy, individual value gained from such performance seems to take place after the performance is over. In first creating meaning and then re-combining it together, fantasy is critically distant from, yet strongly linked to everyday life. Individuals become aware of and learn to use one's meaning system in new ways, thus disturbing norms and rules, and re-defining the real. This allows the feeling of agency that extends beyond fantasy performance into everyday life. As it becomes evident, one has to relinquish one's personal goals and self for the sake of the common good in order to better understand their self. The performance still becomes personal, but only in the long-term, as it is performed and then connected to one's life. Nostalgia rarely sets in, with the outcome of the performance rather being reflection. This leads me to believe that nostalgia and reflection are facets of the same process, mutating based on the various elements of performance I have discussed.

With reference to my discussion in Chapter 8 on fantasy allowing individuals to invest into reality, I propose that both types of fantasy performances are reactions to a hole or void in the real (following Zizek 1992). The void is a product of individuals engaging in fantasy performance and it is animated by the participatory frame of the performance. Entertainment-driven fantasy performance fills in and then closes this void, re-establishing reality after an excursion elsewhere. Moreover, as the basis of the performance is extremely familiar, entertainment-driven fantasy is almost a part of our naturalised symbolic order, resulting in quite a minor breach of reality created by its performance. Exploration-driven fantasy, on the other hand, reinforces the void, keeping it open and making it obvious to performers. Zizek (1992) suggests that when the void is identified with the self, it leads the individual away from reality to join with something outside the symbolic order. This may be dangerous, but can also lead to deeper reflection and novel understanding. In exploration-driven fantasy performance reality and fantasy are differentiated through the performance of self and character, and, therefore, I would argue that negotiating the void does indeed become oriented at the self, thus allowing deeper reflection and learning.

Tolkien (1964) wrote that fantasy involves not being a slave to reality. I have shown that fantasy performance becomes a way of resisting reality, which can take place either by avoiding it or by becoming almost painfully aware of it.

10 CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this research was to explore the experience of fantasy in order to attain conceptual clarity as well as an understanding of how it is performed and how it is linked to the everyday reality of individuals. Through building on work from various fields of research, I have provided a perspective on fantasy performance that is bodily and negotiated. In addition to gaining conceptual clarity, a better understanding of fantasy performance, and the various ways in which its performance emerges, this research provides new insight into how fantasy is linked to such concepts, as entertainment, mediated performance, nostalgia, desire, agency, and Utopia, informing the understanding and future exploration of these concepts and processes. I hope this study provides insight not only into human experiences of the non-real, but also into our current subjective experience of reality, society, and shared meaning, giving light to new ideas, new understanding, and new inquiries.

My study is not without limitations. The findings are limited to the research context as well as the cultural context. As I pointed out, LARP is not performed in the same way in different countries, and it is thus possible that the experience of fantasy also emerges differently in the various cultural contexts. It is important for future studies to look into how fantasy emerges in LARP as well as other forms of RPG in other cultures. Exploring how embodied fantasy emerges in various contexts, as well as why they do or do not differ would enrich our understanding of fantasy as part of contemporary life. Moreover, this study focused on fantasy as an embodied, bodily phenomenon, thus overlooking many of its psychological aspects. It would be important to combine the various perspectives in order to gain a holistic understanding of the experience of fantasy.

In this concluding chapter, I summarise the outcomes of my research and provide suggestions for future research.

10.1 Extending Our Understanding of Fantasy

The main aim of this research was to explore the performance of fantasy in order to gain clarity as regards the concept as well as to understand how individuals engage in such performance. I show that fantasy is more than just a freeform, playful entertainment that involves escaping into another world. Based on my findings and discussion, I propose that fantasy involves simultaneous and con-

scious dual performance, one of reality and the other its complete transformation; a transformation that aims at being outside our normalised symbolic order. The transformation comes to life through and is closely guided by a well-defined structure. Fantasy is therefore different from everyday life in the form of its performance as well as in its attitude toward reality, which becomes simultaneously more distant and more clear. These ideas build on and extend the work of Walton (1990) and Paskow (2004) who have proposed that fantasy involves dual consciousness. This also supports and develops Firat's (2001) and Cohen and Taylor's (1976) suggestions that fantasy may be a matter of difference in orientation to or perception of reality. This means that fantasy is not a process of escape from reality (Belk and Costa 1998; Sherry et al. 2001; Kozinets et al. 2004; Martin 2004), but rather a different way of engaging with reality and its intersubjective, spatial, as well as temporal elements.

In response to the "paradox of belief", I propose that creating the belief in the performance of fantasy does not involve the suspension of disbelief (Coleridge 1906), the suspension of everyday affairs (Badiou 1990), links to real-life elements (Weston 1975, in Radford and Weston 1975), or different existential commitments (Boruah 1988). Fantasy is believed in through the created fantasy truth, that is, ultimate shared meaning that is unconditional in the temporally and spatially limited performance. This is supported by individuals consciously taking on a set of norms and rules for the duration of the performance, which results in an experience of a logical whole.

Building on the work of Fine (1983), Schechner (1983), and McAuley (2000), I propose that the performance of fantasy involves a structure of three frames (reality, participatory, and make-believe frames) that form an hourglass model. During the performance of fantasy, the make-believe frame involves acting, that is, explicitly synthesised and synchronised performing within one frame of interaction and focusing on only the subjective experience in and of that context. The reality frame involves spectating, which entails explicitly desynthesised and desynchronised performance that is aware of both the frame of acting and frames outside of it, resulting in a position of more objective and absolute knowledge. The participatory frame is merely supportive of the other two, keeping a conscious note of their continued potentiality, but cannot be performed on its own. This results in the perceived duality of performance, which is anchored in the performance of roles and social spaces.

In addition to its structure, fantasy performance is defined by the following characteristics. Firstly, fantasy performance strives toward clarity, which seems to be a response to contemporary culture's anxiety-provoking overabundance of choice. Individuals gain a clear and articulated structure for performance that they feel to be lacking within their reality, as well as a more concrete experience of place among a culture of placelessness and an explicit, yet extremely synthesised and synchronised experience of time. It is important to note that unlike Blanchette (2014) and Belk and Costa (1998) describe, fantasy performance does not strive for easiness or simplicity. Fantasy can be difficult and complex, but it always involves clarity. The centrality of this characteristic for the performers provides us with insight into how individuals deal with the above-described anxiety and how it

influences their understanding of their environment and its structures. The clarity is reached through reflexive, bodily performance and interaction, as well as the use of material and spatial elements. This study extends previous work that has suggested that material goods can become resources for building fantasy (Joy and Sherry 2003; Kozinets et al. 2004; St. James, Handelman, and Taylor 2011; Fernandez and Lastovicka 2011; Chronis, Arnould, and Hampton 2013)

Secondly, fantasy performance finds its basis in clichés and archetypes that largely originate in popular culture and media. Consequently, the live performance of fantasy becomes based on and is a repetition of mediated performance. Fantasy performance is nevertheless experienced as tangible, authentic, and live, in some cases even more so that the performance of reality. This supports and extends the ideas of fantasy being closely intertwined with popular culture and media (Suvin 1988; Kozinets 2001; Mackay 2001). More importantly, this supports Auslander's (2008) theorisation of the co-existence of live and mediated performance, while also opening up new questions. How exactly do these layers of repeated and live performance overlap and interact? More importantly, if a personal, bodily performance is no longer fully live and ephemeral, and fantasy performance becomes more live than reality, how will contemporary culture develop its relationship to live performance, which is still valued as more authentic? This is especially important to understand from the point of view of how consumer culture is being performed, as most media elements are simultaneously consumption elements.

Thirdly, fantasy performance is shared and synchronised in a very articulated manner. Individual fantasies of performers form the basis for and are recombined into a shared fantasy, which allows clear mutual understanding, as well as new compound meanings and multiple points of view. Similar to Saler (2012) as well as Chronis, Arnould, and Hampton (2013), I have proposed that fantasy is formed as a collective narrative. The underlying meaning of fantasy performance is shared on a much deeper level than within everyday life, yet, in being explicitly articulated, also becomes removed from reality through breaking its continuity. The shared quality of fantasy reflects individualised contemporary culture in that it is assembled and is a result of a combination of multiple individual points of view. I have shown that through fantasy performances we can assemble and build deep, shared understanding, which is unavailable in everyday life. This links back to and also extends the literature on the creation and negotiation of communities based on consumption (e.g. Schouten and McAlexander 1995; Peñaloza 2000, 2001; Kates 2002) and fantasy (Kozinets 2002a; Goulding, Shankar, and Canniford 2011), as well as the idea of consumption processes and objects forming the basis of mutual understanding (Auslander 2008; Rowe 2008). However, it is possible to question whether meaning and understanding are truly shared in this case, or simply combined individual points of view. It remains unclear as to what this means in terms of gaining shared meaning within contemporary culture at large.

Fourthly, fantasy performance involves behaviour that is not naturalised. Fantasy involves a break or disturbance of the seeming continuity of reality and the negotiation of the created void through dual performance (following and extending Zizek 1992; Wyllie 2005; Zukauskaite 2008; Fuchs 2010). This void simultaneously lies outside of reality while also framing what we understand as

reality. Ironically, it is thus fantasy, which is stigmatised as being irrational and useless, that provides us with rational structures as well as clarity of goals and meaning.

To summarise, fantasy can be described as non-naturalised behaviour based in everyday performance, during which individuals are forced to become hyper-aware of both the new performance and its basis. A distance is created by the explicit awareness of two simultaneous performances, yet familiarity is retained through the basis in clichés and archetypes, that is, patterns that individuals are extremely accustomed to. The awareness and separation of the two performances is guided by their clear structure of fantasy. The shared quality of the performance further encourages individuals to sustain the structure, thus supporting other participants' belief in the fantasy.

It becomes apparent that fantasy is a phenomenon that is explicitly reflexive and thus extremely cognitive, just as previous research has suggested (Grayson and Martinec 2004; Martin 2004; Rose and Wood 2005; Fernandez and Lastovicka 2011; Jenkins, Nixon, and Molesworth 2011). However, following Chronis, Arnould, and Hampton's (2013) call to explore fantasy beyond mental imagery, I have shown that the phenomenon is also explicitly bodily and deeply synchronised with material and spatial elements, as well as other performers.

10.2 Fantasy and Reality

Another central question addressed by this research is the relationship between fantasy and reality performances. Following my proposed definition and structure of fantasy performance, it becomes apparent that while fantasy and reality may gain equal value for individuals, may become somewhat overlapping, and may use similar elements as their basis, the two are always consciously differentiated. Hence, fantasy and reality do not become blurred in their performance, as Peñaloza (1998) and Kozinets (2001) have suggested.

Fantasy and reality have become equally valued, yet not equivalent to one another, as individuals clearly distinguish the two (following Grayson and Martinec 2004; St. James, Handelman, and Taylor 2011). Fantasy is not reality, but it is real, as it creates real emotions, reactions, and experiences. Therefore, fantasy is neither a second-hand substitute for reality (following Sherry et al. 2001), nor inferior to reality (e.g., Kozinets et al. 2004). My findings show that fantasy is rather an addition to reality; a matter of gaining new experiences and possibilities.

I proposed that fantasy is a type of attitude towards and an interpretation of performance. Consequently, the same thing can be fantasy or reality depending on its perception. Reality can become fantasy through dual performance, while fantasy can become reality through loss of dual vision and social support. This confirms Grayson and Martinec's (2004) supposition that reality and fantasy only become blurred from an objective, third person point of view.

The performance of fantasy and performance of reality are explicitly differentiated by individuals, yet the two are not strictly separate (Grayson and Martinec 2004), as they are intrinsically linked to one another. Schechner (1988, 2006) and

Turner proposed that aesthetic and social performance exist in continuous feedback, with one always building on the other. It seems that fantasy performance and reality performance also exist in continuous feedback, but in a somewhat different manner. Fantasy is based on reality, yet simultaneously strives away from reality, thus involving a continuous dual performance. This process helps us define what we understand as real and reality.

Fantasy performance involves a breach of reality as well as the negotiation and comparison of the created void to reality (following Zizek 1992). The well-structured and clearly understood void in reality first acts as a filter that is used to build the make-believe frame for the fantasy performance. It also works the other way around in creating awareness of the structure of everyday performance, on which the fantasy performance is based. This results in new, explicit understanding of norms, roles, and meaning, as well as learning new ways of manipulating these. Fantasy thus does not involve the loss of control and ambiguity (Belk and Costa 1998; Kozinets et al. 2004; Blanchette 2014), but the feeling of agency through acknowledging one's limiting structures.

Kozinets (2002a), St. James, Handelman, and Taylor (2011), as well as Chronis, Arnould, and Hampton (2013) have suggested that fantasy can be seen as an expression of consumer agency. While my findings support and expand on this idea, I believe that this agency is not based on the mix of elements of fantasy and reality (St. James, Handelman, and Taylor 2011) nor is it semi-volitional (Kozinets et al. 2004). I suggest that, in fantasy, individuals gain the feeling of agency through the explicit structuring of the non-naturalised performance as well as the resultant clear synthesis and synchronisation of performance, which allows understanding, critiquing, and renegotiating of one's everyday performances. I believe that this aspect of fantasy performance is what allows the negotiation of meanings and norms that previous research has alluded to (Rook and Levy 1983; Peñaloza 2001; Hoogland 2002; Martin 2004; Goulding, Shankar, and Canniford 2011). Moreover, agency as emerging from explicit self-awareness helps explain the processes behind the findings of previous research that suggest that fantasy helps individuals set and pursue goals (St. James, Handelman, and Taylor 2011), become more motivated (Rook and Levy 1983), as well as cope with problems in more productive ways (Kozinets et al. 2004). Lastly, this finding answers the call by Arnould, Price, and Otnes (1999) as well as Chronis, Arnould, and Hampton (2013) to outline how fantasy is incorporated into contemporary experiences.

It becomes apparent that individuals can develop themselves through engaging in fantasy (e.g., Green 2004; Mar et al. 2006). More specifically, individuals develop an understanding of and control over their realities. Previous research also heavily ties fantasy into identity development (Rook and Levy 1983; Arnould and Price 1993; Schouten 1991; Belk and Costa 1998). Bakhtin (1984) and Jameson (2005) believe the self to be the central reference point of fantasy, because fantasy involves the extension of one's awareness. My findings coincide with these ideas: fantasy performance involves explicit self-awareness that allows self-development. However, in contrast with previous literature, I suggest that fantasy does not entail a blurred self (Schechner 1988, 2006), the extension of self (Stanislavski 1991), a dual/multiple self (Markus and Nurius 1986; Bahl and Milne 2010), becoming

someone else (Belk and Costa 1998), or a liminal or liminoid self (Turner 1969). The self is an important part of the performance, but it becomes only one of the roles being negotiated and compared. The result is a performance that is experienced as self-less.

Zizek (1997) proposed that a fantasy involves an inter-subjectivity that attempts to answer the question "What does society want from me?" (p. 9). Based on my findings, fantasy performance allows individuals to gain an answer to this question through shedding light on social structures as well as through providing the tools to mould one's own position. This means that fantasy performance in itself does not trickle back into or shape reality, but it can spark shifts in norms and in culture by revealing how these work, thus allowing the liberating, political potential Agnew (1986), Zipes (1983), and Auslander (1992) wondered about. Fantasy does not disturb the rules (following Jackson 1981), but *shows* us the rules, leaving us to use that knowledge as we please.

Armitt (1996) pointed out that whoever defines what is reality holds power over it. Oppression is thus closely tied to the idea of the real. Hence, if we can redefine the real, we also gain power over our lives. Meyerhold (1968) wrote that we should not try to master reality, but rather master ourselves by understanding our attitude toward it. The agency emerging from fantasy becomes a matter of orientation in performance, which gives us the tools to master our realities through our own performance in them.

10.3 Types of Fantasy

This research further provides an understanding of the different types of performances in which fantasy emerges. I present these through two extreme forms, which I call entertainment-driven and exploration-driven. This typology extends the work of Hume (1984), Todorov (1970), and Jackson (1981), as well as reflects on Armitt's (1996) and Belk and Costa's (1998) ideas of fantasy taking on multiple forms.

The main differences between the two types is manifest through the means by which the central characteristics of the fantasy performance emerge, how individuals interact and engage with the performance, as well as what they gain from the performance. Comparing the different types of fantasy performances allowed a more nuanced understanding of their characteristics, and has shed light on various theoretical concepts and phenomena, such as nostalgia and reflection, Utopia, emancipation, as well as the interconnection of live and mediated performance. In the following, I recap on the differences between the two performances through the main characteristics of fantasy performance that I have proposed.

Firstly, in entertainment-driven fantasy, clarity and a holistic understanding of the performance is maintained throughout the performance, while in exploration-driven, the performance becomes fully clear only after it is finished. The former allows for instant relief from the anxiety of contemporary consumer culture, while the latter encourages individuals to build up to it, creating a deeper personal engagement. It becomes important to stress the difference in the basis of these

two performances. In entertainment-driven fantasy, the shared structure is given and thus there is no need to strive for shared clarity, its synthesis and synchronisation. Exploration-driven fantasy, however, requires performers to consciously aspire to shared, synthesised, and synchronised understanding that has not been directly articulated. The clear structure can be either be received or built up by the individuals, creating a different focus in the performance.

Secondly, clichés and archetypes are used differently in the two performances. Entertainment-driven fantasy uses these quite directly, often repeating entire narratives, characters, and worlds from popular culture, thus creating a very approachable and understandable performance. Exploration-driven fantasy mixes and recombines elements, making them less obvious, with the fantasy performance becoming more complex for its performers. Both performances reflect the interconnected nature of live and mediated performance (Kozinets 2001; Mackay 2001; Auslander 2008), but the greater saturation of media elements seems to create an experience of a live and realistic performance. This explains the closer connection of exploration-driven fantasy to the experience of reality, and sheds new light on the role of mediated performance in building both fantasy and reality.

Thirdly, entertainment-driven fantasy is shared through the direct and articulated negotiation of structures and frames, while exploration-driven fantasy is shared in the active, but more vague construction of meaning and structure together. Both thus involve explicit synchronisation of performance, but the former is given beforehand and relies on its discussion, while the latter emerges during the performance and is negotiated individually. Entertainment-driven fantasy allows individuals to be more reactive in the performance of fantasy, placing more importance on spectating. Exploration-driven fantasy, on the other hand, requires performers to be more active, with the spectator role being rarely used and the focus being placed almost completely on the acting. Because it is directly received and clearly removed from reality, the fantasy truth of entertainment-driven fantasy is experienced as artificial. Exploration-driven fantasy results in a more reality-applicable and authentic fantasy truth, as it is built up individually during the shared performance.

Fourthly, the non-naturalised behaviour and the resultant duality of fantasy and reality performances are negotiated in different ways. In entertainment-driven fantasy, the negotiation and separation of fantasy and reality is more pronounced in the social space and place of the performance, which are strongly associated with spatial and material elements. In exploration-driven fantasy, the differentiation occurs more pronouncedly through the bodily performance of roles, that is, the self and the character. One performance focuses on enacting place, while the other on enacting activity. This aspect of fantasy performance gives further insight into how material and spatial elements can be incorporated into fantasy performance (Rook and Levy 1983; Belk and Costa 1998; Martin 2004; Fernandez and Lastovicka 2011; Jenkins, Nixon, and Molesworth 2011; St. James, Handelman and Taylor 2011; Chronis, Arnould, and Hampton 2013), as well as how the different use of these elements can result in different types of fantasy experiences.

Lastly, fantasy can have very different outcomes for its performers. Entertainment-driven fantasy allows the realisation of desires and a seeming relief from

everyday life; an individual Utopia. This process is somewhat similar to Kozinets' (2002) "youtopia". The realisation of desires occurs instantly, but is also short-lived, as the value is only possible for the duration of the performance, caught in the enactment of place. Emancipation is thus bound to the temporal and spatial limitations of fantasy performance, and is largely bound to the norms of reality an individual is trying to flee. The lack of reflection in this performance seems to be caused by its personal nature and the extensive oscillation of frames that can cause the parallel performances to be mixed in their resynthesis. Exploration-driven fantasy involves the co-creation of an emergent non-real world, with each performer acting individually, yet with a goal to create shared understanding, a collective Utopian process. The performance reflects the reality of our fragmented contemporary culture, but transpires in a limited and well-defined context. The initially individual performance allows deeper understanding of roles, interaction, and structures, as its meaning is re-combined and reflected on in a shared manner among other performers. Long-lasting emancipation sets in through this new orientation toward and understanding of how reality and one's place in it work. This seems to be aided by a distinct lack of both personal desires and the oscillation of the frames as part of the performance. All in all, this findings shows that the void negotiated by fantasy can be either concealed or exposed, resulting in nostalgia or reflection accordingly. Contributing to the literature on nostalgia (Jafari and Taheri 2014; Higson 2014), it is possible to say that nostalgia is simply a facet of reflexivity created by fantasy.

The presented typology provides a clearer understanding of what the performance of fantasy allows, as well as how elements of the performance influence individuals' experiences and their outcomes. In contrast to much of the previous literature (Kozinets 2001; Martin 2004; Kozinets et al. 2004; Rose and Wood 2005), it becomes apparent that fantasy is not just a fancy-free and entertaining spectacle that is used for attaining personal desires. Fantasy is also an explicitly reflexive performance that results in the development of self and deep engagement with one's surroundings.

The typology of fantasy performances provides important insight into the discussions on emancipation and agency. Based on my findings, emancipation can take on different forms as part of fantasy performance. Emancipation can be bound by the temporal and spatial limitations of fantasy performance, as Kozinets (2002a) has proposed. Alternatively, more long-lasting emancipation can set in through new orientation toward reality and an understanding of how one's place in it works. Hence, the feeling of agency that fantasy creates can either apply only to the performance of fantasy or also outside of its confines in the everyday world. This provides a new perspective to questions raised by Agnew (1986), Kozinets (2001, 2002a), Mackay (2001), and Atwood (2011) about the function of fantasy in everyday life. It becomes apparent that fantasy performance can both reinforce existing structures, as well as provide the tools to subvert these structures through their explicit understanding.

The typology further sheds light on the relationship of fantasy performance to the organisation of space (Agnew 1986; Zukin 1991; Sherry et al. 2001; Kozinets et al. 2004), the formation of communities (Kozinets 2002a; Goulding,

Shankar, and Canniford 2011), and the use of predetermined materials for control of performance (Agnew 1986; Firat and Venkatesh 1995). The two types of performance could thus be related to various forms of marketed experiences, influencing product, service, and servicescape design (e.g. Arnould, Price, and Otnes 1999; Sherry et al. 2001; Peñaloza 2001; Kozinets et al. 2004) in the contemporary market, where companies are increasingly using fantasy as part of thematisation and design (Firat and Ulusoy 2007; Borghini et al. 2009).

10.4 Consumption as Aesthetic Performance

While it was not an aim of my study, the research also provides insight into the use of dramaturgy, theatre, and aesthetics within consumer research. It is important to note that aesthetics far exceeds "obvious" forms, such as art (Charters 2006), and rather seeps into all elements of life, thus forming an important perspective for academic study. These findings extend and question our understanding of roles and performances taken on in both consumption and production.

It has often been suggested that the interaction between marketers and consumers, especially in the retail context, has a theatrical and dramaturgical nature (Deighton 1992; Peñaloza 1998; Moisio and Arnould 2005). Consumption is often presented as a spectacle created for or with consumers (Deighton 1992; Peñaloza 1998; Kozinets et al. 2004; Moisio and Arnould 2005). Traditionally, producers are seen as active performers, as well as the dramaturges and directors creating the whole performance, while consumers are presented as the passive spectators. Recent studies have nevertheless stressed that consumers can also become actors (Deighton 1992; Firat and Dholakia 2006), and that individuals may take multiple and overlapping roles (Joy and Sherry 2003; Joy et al. 2014). Moreover, research has shown that producers and consumers interact in creating products, experiences, and meanings (Arnould and Price 1993; Belk 2013; Deighton and Grayson 1995; Kozinets et al. 2004; Kozinets et al. 2010; Moisio and Beruchashvili 2010). Yet the two groups of people are clearly kept apart and their roles are seen as very different. Consumers are often presented as playful, pleasure-seeking, semi-volitional producers, merely borrowing the role to swiftly return it once the fun is over. This sustains the idea of equating actors with being active and spectators with being passive.

My study shows that acting and spectating are not the clear-cut processes they would seem to be, but may rather involve various forms of interaction with one's context. I proposed that acting involves explicitly synthesised and synchronised performance in one frame of interaction, which results in a very focused, subjective point of view. Spectating is more desynthesised and desynchronised, and involves linking performance focused on one frame to things outside of it, thus allowing a more objective perspective. Both roles can be active or passive, as well as involve consumption and production.

This perspective helps understand how individuals perform consumption rather than just interact with consumption goods and spaces. Not all types of performances are directed at attaining personal desires or intently focused on

material aspects. Moreover, distinguishing (and helping create) the types of roles and types of performances consumers are engaging in can help marketers in providing different types of value, in answering different needs, and in producing different types of outcomes for consumption experiences. Therefore, these findings expand and give depth to the metaphor of consumption as dramaturgy or theatre (Sherry 1998; Peñaloza 1998; Sherry et al. 2001), providing new insight into consumer experience and servicescape planning (Arnould, Price, and Otnes 1999; Kozinets et al. 2004).

Based on these ideas, I propose that to acquire a better understanding of the various consumption and production processes, it is central to explore how individuals take on different roles, sometimes multiple roles simultaneously, as in the fantasy performances I have described. We need to step away from seeing producers and consumers as being on either sides of the stage, and rather see them all as individuals partaking in a performance through various roles and their corresponding ways of interaction. This perspective, of course, opens a plethora of new questions left unanswered. What types of roles and performances do producers or marketers engage in? Can they be spectators? Who is the director? Who paces the performance? How do all the different roles interact and influence performance?

10.5 Art as Method

Creating art was an important part of the research process. When conducting my research, I found it increasingly difficult to conceptualise my own experience and the experiences of my interviewees using only verbal and textual tools. Emotion and intuition are central parts of fantasy performances, and these are not purely cognitive. The role of the artwork in my research was twofold. Firstly, the process of creating the artworks allowed me a better understanding of my data, its interpretation, and the theoretical constructs I was working with. Secondly, the artworks provided an opportunity to communicate my work to others in new ways and gave individuals an opportunity to engage with it on a more embodied and emotional level. For instance, the artworks were used to represent and communicate my research at various conferences and during presentations.

In addition to supporting my written work, the artwork emerged as an outcome in its own right. Based on the same data, method, and theory as my written research, the artworks became an outlet for the non-verbal perspectives emanating from this project. Instead of just representing my findings, the art pieces opened up the topic of fantasy performance to new perspectives and discussions. Collingwood (1938) proposed that the aesthetic process allows us to step to the very edge of our knowledge and capabilities, encouraging us to do more. As a result, creating art builds and develops our knowledge in ways we may be unable to do otherwise. The process of painting research has impelled me to think and deal with my work in different ways, revealing possibilities for new meanings and perspectives.

The idea of using art and academic research together in order to progress both is by no means new, as I discussed in detail in Chapter 6. However, it is still

rarely used, especially in the field of consumer research. I hope that this study inspires future research to use some of these methods of analysis and representation, as well as engage in brave, cross-disciplinary collaborations. I believe such practices can promote exciting new possibilities for the development of knowledge and the understanding of human nature.

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We often engage with things that we consciously perceive not to be real. Fantasy has a strong presence in everyday life: it is a part of our identities, our communities, and our meanings. While we may have a common-sense feel for what fantasy is, it has rarely been the focus of research. Set within a performance methodology, this study maps out how individuals engage with the embodied and negotiated performance of fantasy in contemporary culture. The ethnographic and art-based research suggests that fantasy can be seen as a different type of interpretation of normalised performance and reality.

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